

Strange

STORIES



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13
COMPLETE
STORIES
IN THIS
ISSUE!

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FEATURING
ONE MAN'S HELL
A Weird Novelet
of a Tortured Soul
By **ELI COLTER**

*Reichelt
Illustration*



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Strange STORIES

VOL. III, NO. 2

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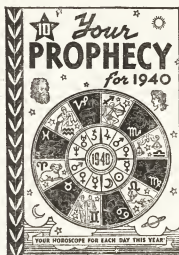
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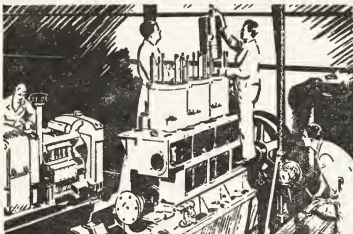
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One Man's Hell

By ELI COLTER

Author of "The Crawling Corpse," "The Pride of Caiagus," etc.

CHAPTER I

Temptation

SO YOU think Barney Ballinger is a changed man, do you? Well maybe. I certainly will never forget the Barney Ballinger I once knew—young, eager, alert, filled with a kind of bubbly-water animal spirits, you might say. He thrust his hand through his hair so often, in sheer nervous unrestraint, that he always looked untidy. But his hazel eyes used to flash defiance. He didn't care what he looked like. He was a man who knew no hell and feared no consequences. At least, he didn't—then.

Today, you would know Barney Ballinger only by his name. The ruffled black hair is now combed smoothly. His flashing hazel eyes have deepened,

stilled by the horror they have seen.

Barney Ballinger has plumbed his particular hell. He bears the marks of psychic torture, and he always will. . . .

Sitting in his private office that day—it seemed so long ago, now that it was over—he had no idea that his hell gaped so near. He supported his chin in cupped hands, his elbows spread wide on each side of a blueprint on his desk.

This was the man who did not believe in hell, any kind of hell. To him, the word was an appropriately short, sharp expletive, or a convenient, though mythological, place to wish on anyone who annoyed him.

He was wishing John Grace Gearheart there now. Since Gearheart was what he was, and Barney intended do-

A COMPLETE WEIRD NOVELET

ing something that would shock his rigidly scrupulous partner, Barney expected a silly row. He didn't shrink from a row. Sometimes, like any other active man, he loved a lusty fight. But these scraps over obsolete morality annoyed him. What annoyed him even more was Gearheart's power, as senior partner of the firm, to veto Barney's slick ideas. If Gearheart found out—

Staring intently at the blueprint, Barney's lips tightened.

"Can't pass this up," he muttered. "I'll just have to keep him in the dark, that's all."

In mocking retort, the buzzer rasped, summoning him to Gearheart's office. Barney's hazel eyes flashed to the door. He ruffled his dark hair impatiently. Had Gearheart found something suspicious? Shrewdly, Barney's mind explored every defense, but he waited, listening, until the buzzer rasped again. This time it was peremptory.

Then he lunged upright, squared his shoulders pugnaciously as he threw open the door leading to Gearheart's office. The moment you saw Gearheart, you knew why he annoyed Barney. He always wore black, his cadaverous eyes were always frosty, and his countless wrinkles were all straight, grim, downward-pointing.

"What do you want, J. G.?" Barney asked guardedly.

GEARHEART pursed his lips, rubbed his right ear. His voice, when it came, was bland, and its very blandness warned Barney.

"Wry—ah—who is Joel Markheim?"

Swift rage almost burned to sight through Ballinger's guard. How much had J. G. run down? The flashing hazel eyes went still and wary.

"Why?" he evaded.

John Grace Gearheart wasn't ashamed of his honesty. He saw nothing naive in truth and sincerity.

"He just called me up—this Markheim chap," he said reluctantly. "Is that enough? Or do I have to add that he spoke about the big pool we're launching? You and I have been together for a good while, Barney. Naturally, I'll give you the benefit of the

doubt. I want you to speak for yourself."

Ballinger set his jaw. "Sorry. I don't know what you're talking about."

Gearheart liked and trusted Barney Ballinger. Voluntarily, he had raised him to a partnership. But neither liking nor regret, nor any other emotion, could soften Gearheart when he was faced with evil.

"I am afraid you know what I mean, Barney. Markheim couldn't have given complete details without some truth."

Barney weighed open hostility against the discretion of cunning retreat. He decided on the mask of ignorance.

"There's something I don't grasp, J. G. What does Markheim know so much about?"

Barney had his own ideas about Gearheart. J. G. was a narrow-minded old egg. He really believed all the rules of conduct he lived by. But he was old. He could never hold out against determined opposition. If this discussion continued much longer Barney would simply tell J. G. to mind his own business and let him handle the Markheim affair. But Gearheart had a bombshell of his own.

"I am speaking about the pool, and you know it," he stated flatly. "You and I know it's a colossal scheme—about the most original, practicable scheme ever promoted in the oil business. Markheim claims the scheme is his. He brought it to you, you reshaped it and presented it to me as your own, leaving him out entirely."

Ballinger stood immobile, chilled by consternation. Damn Markheim! No evading, lying, acting innocent now. This meant war to the bitter end.

"His scheme?" he rapped out. "Rats! He didn't have any scheme. All he had was a germ, the bare bones of an idea. I'm the one who developed the germ into an idea. I made it into a whale of a money-making scheme!"

"Barney!" Gearheart broke in, his voice harsh with rebuke. "If Markheim hadn't come to me with the basic idea, you could not have constructed the finished plan. Whatever you did to make it work, it's still his idea. You agreed to give him one-third of the

profits. I can't let you break an agreement you made in the firm's name. Is that clear?"

Against his will, Barney recoiled. J. G. *couldn't* stand up to him like this!

"He demanded a third of the profits," Barney explained hastily, almost in a panic. "I put him off. I said we'd give him a third of the profits if we took up his proposition. We haven't taken it up. I took the germ, which didn't amount to anything, and made up my own scheme. We don't owe him a damned cent."

A DAZED, stunned look blurred Gearheart's eyes, as if someone had dealt him a blow that turned his soul sick. His voice was dulled, unbelieving.

"Barney, that you should stoop to open dishonesty—"

"Dishonesty my eye!" Barney hooted. "It's nearly noon, and I'm hungry. Think it over. You'll see I'm right. The scheme is ours. Markheim is out in the cold."

He deliberately turned and walked out of the office. After all, it was his word against Markheim's. If he put on enough pressure, Gearheart would be forced to trail along, in spite of his surprising resistance. This scheme was too good for him to fight. Give Markheim a third of the profits? Ballinger laughed at the thought. Yet he was uneasy as he settled again at his desk to study the blueprint.

What tack would old J. G. take next? What tricky move would he make?

Barney waited all the rest of the day for some sign from Gearheart. None came till they were closing the office in the evening. Then Gearheart asked quietly if they could stop at the Athletic Club for dinner together. Barney agreed, with equal casualness, but he felt a quick impulse of relief. They dined so often at the club together that the act was almost a part of daily routine. The battle was already won, Barney thought. Old J. G. was going to leave the Markheim business to him without more ado.

He talked idly about trivial matters as the two drove to the club in Gear-

heart's car. He continued to seem at ease until they sat down at a corner table in the dining room. Then he leaned toward Barney on arms that were suddenly trembling.

"This matter has to be settled," he said abruptly. "I want to know exactly how you propose to deal with Markheim."

Barney leaned back in his chair. For once, his nervously mobile face was drawn into a hard, brilliant smile that he felt couldn't fool old J. G.

"You leave him to me," he lied to answer easily. "I'll see that he gets his share."

CHAPTER II

The Fall

GEARHEART appeared sickened by the treachery of his trusted partner.

"And you consider his just share precisely nothing. I know. Don't interrupt me, Barney. You actually think you aren't doing anything crooked, that you're merely pulling a bit of sharp work. You promised Markheim a third of the profits. There is no other just share. The plan is Markheim's, no matter how you enlarged, twisted, expanded it. You can't get away with open theft in my firm."

"Theft!" Barney cried. "Don't be so damned insulting, J. G. This isn't only for me, you know—"

"Theft!" Gearheart repeated venomously. "Plain, ordinary theft, no matter how you try to rationalize or explain it away. You didn't expect me to find out, did you? And when I found out, you thought you could wear me down to capitulation."

"I can stop you, Barney, and I will. But even if I couldn't you'd have to pay for your crime. Maybe that doesn't convince you. This will—The firm of Gearheart always stood for honesty. Gearheart and Ballinger will stand for the same thing while I live!"

"Don't let your own ads take you in," Barney snapped back. "Business

is like politics. It's a cutthroat game, every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. I'm not going to be the hindmost. I'm taking mine while the getting's good."

"Barney, a man like you, with an honorable war record—"

Ballinger was roused to savagery. "Honor hasn't a damned thing to do with it! It's business, and nothing else but!"

"It is a question of honor, you poor, money-blinded young idiot. Business must be as honest as any other sphere of a man's life, or it is damnably poor business."

Ballinger was really fighting now. He wasn't counting costs or words.

"Don't talk like a preacher, J. G. Honor, hell! Markheim can't do a damned thing. He may call us up once in a while and make a nuisance of himself, but he can't prove that there ever was any agreement. He has nothing to show for it but my word."

THE color drained from Gearheart's face. His eyes had been hard and passionate, burning with the urge to convince. Now all mercy and all indulgence was gone from them.

"Nothing but your word?" he spat out, his nostrils flaring with fury. "Nobody ever needed any more than that with me. And that's how it's going to remain. You're a low crook, Barney. I don't know how you fooled me. If we have to put everything in black and white to make you keep your word—"

"That's enough out of you!" Barney interrupted viciously. "I'm half of this firm, remember, *that's* in black and white! You can't stop me in this deal. I'll see Markheim in hell before I hand him a million in cold cash."

"And I'll see you in hell before I let you engineer anything crooked. I'm senior partner. You can't act without my approval. *That's* in black and white, too."

Gearheart paused, his gaze resting on Barney's lapel. Thrust into the buttonhole was a single large blossom of red clover.

"You don't fool me, Barney," he whispered tensely. "Hardly anybody wears clover in a buttonhole. It's too

simple, too plain—too honest. But those are the qualities of clover that you love, aren't they, Barney? You'd like to be plain and honest. And you would be if you weren't drunk for the moment with money. Be like that clover, Barney! You're sensitive enough to love simplicity and honesty in a flower. Why—"

Barney's raging temper slipped all bounds. He sprang from his seat.

"You're talking like a doddering old idiot! I wear clover because it fits this outfit." He leaned over the table. "I'd give anything to handle this deal my own way. I could, if you were out of it. This is my first chance to make a million. It'll probably be the only chance. You can't stop me, J. G. I'll fight you every inch of the way. I'll pull out of the firm, spring the scheme on my own hook. I'll make *all* the profits. Markheim can go to hell, and you with him!"

"Sit down!" Gearheart's eyes burned him with scorn. "You're making a conspicuous ass of yourself. You can't withdraw from the firm and launch the scheme yourself. In the first place, you haven't enough cash. Then Markheim and I will block you at every turn if you do manage to get cash. Cool off now, Barney. You'll see things differently in the morning. Get your hat, now, and let me drive you home."

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, Barney Ballinger let himself into his bachelor quarters. The heat of his fury had subsided to a grim determination. He could think of a dozen ways of beating Gearheart, even with Markheim.

He removed his hat and coat and ordered his Japanese servant to bring him a cool drink. Slipping into a heavy blue silk dressing gown, he stretched out in a deep chair and tried to relax. That was impossible. His brain wouldn't stop plotting, figuring. The room was still, but his thoughts seemed to tramp loudly in the air, mocking him.

He reviewed the evening with disgust. That hot quarrel with Gearheart had been a mistake. He should have taken advantage of the ride home

from the club café, instead of bursting out of the car at Gearheart's place, saying he would rather walk the few blocks to his apartment. That was wrong strategy, even if he had hoped that the short walk in the cool night air would steady him. And, of course, it hadn't.

The room, suddenly, was no longer silent. He heard footsteps approach the door—strangely shuffling footsteps that he had never heard before.

Gearheart stood there, an unearthly, profound pity on his deeply wrinkled face.

He shook his head slowly, spoke in a voice heavy with vast regret.

"Barney, I would have saved you this, if I could. But it is decreed, by laws higher than those you and I know, that you walk with horror to save your soul. Remember this, Barney. Please try to remember—what happens to the body is of little moment. The soul is the all-important. But the soul must be clean—clean for eternity!"

Something chilled Ballinger, some ghastly sense of things gone wrong, some tenebrous, dank foreshadow of another world. He tried to rise from his chair, and could not.

"What—what do you mean?" he choked out. "Why—" His words died in paralyzing terror.

For Gearheart was not there. Nothing was there but the door, an awful chill in the air, a beating, terrible silence that shouted through the still room.

But then there were footsteps again, heavy and solid. He knew there would be a knock. When it came, though, he jumped. Again he tried to move. This time he struggled to his feet, his dilated gaze fixed on the door.

"Yes?" he cried, much too loudly. "Who's there?"

The door swung open. The lighting was indirect, yet brass buttons seemed to glitter, four hard eyes gleamed sinisterly, and the blue tunics looked ominously black.

"Police!" he gasped. "What do you want here?"

The taller of the two police officers advanced a step.

"Sorry to be bringin' you such news,

Mr. Ballinger. John Gearheart was murdered a little while ago. Shot dead in his garage, just comin' home from the office."

Blindly, Barney felt for the chair behind him. Gearheart, talking to him from the door? Nonsense! And yet—he knew he had seen his dead partner.

Everything blurred. Abruptly, the room slanted up. Then the ceiling was where the wall had been, and, finally, nothing at all. . . .

The next thing he knew, he was lying on the floor. One policeman was helping him sit up.

"Boy, I don't blame him for fainting," the other said. "He's in for plenty!"

"Shut up," the one kneeling by Ballinger said. "He's coming out of it. He'll hear you." He scowled at Ballinger. "Okay? Better get up. I gotta take you down to Headquarters. The D. A. wants to see you."

Ballinger struggled to his feet, staring, incredulous.

"What? Oh, all right. But—J. G. murdered! That's crazy. I left him just a little while ago—" He choked off, frightened.

"Yeah?" the policeman asked interestedly. "That's something the D. A.'ll want to know."

CHAPTER III

Damnation

DISTRICT ATTORNEY PAT MORAN was said to be the hardest man to fool this side of hell. His eyes were often likened to gimlets. Barney, entering the office with the two officers, stopped short at that hard gaze.

"All right, boys. You can go," the district attorney said. He motioned Ballinger to a chair on the other side of his desk. Ballinger let himself down into it cautiously, uncertain of his strength, and the two policemen left the room. Moran turned his incisive gaze back to Ballinger. "When did you see Gearheart last?"

"About—" Ballinger had to stop to

clear his throat. "About an hour ago."
"Hm. An hour. How did you leave him?"

"At the door of his garage. He was just driving in. I walked home from there. It's only a few blocks. I thought the night air would do me good."

Moran's lips thinned to a grin of triumph.

"Yeah? What were the last words you said to him?" he shot out abruptly.

"Why—I—I just said good night."

"Where had you two been?"

"Dining at the Athletic Club."

"Anything special occur on the way home?"

Ballinger hesitated at this. He tried to think of something innocent.

"Nothing. We weren't talking," he finally admitted.

"Were you on good terms with Gearheart?"

"Certainly," Barney said quickly.

"We'd always been friends."

"Any personal difficulties?"

"None at all." That, he felt, would clear his damning statements.

"That's a lie!" Moran leaned forward, hard eyes glittering. "I want the truth, Ballinger. What were you and Gearheart quarreling about at the club?"

Ballinger swallowed and cleared his throat again.

"We—we weren't quarreling. We were merely discussing a business deal. We didn't agree on it, but the discussion wasn't anything like a quarrel."

"Lying again!" snapped the district attorney. "It certainly was a quarrel. You threatened his life. Four men at the next table heard you say *'I'd give anything to handle this deal my own way. I could, if you were out of it.'* How are you going to explain that?"

Before Ballinger could rouse his appalled wits to reply, the telephone bell at Moran's elbow shrilled.

"Moran," the district attorney said. "Yeah? Okay, Jenks, go ahead."

The flattened voice of Jenks rasped through the wire to the receiver, thin but clear, every word intelligible to Ballinger's straining ears.

"I found it, Boss. Got the record right here. Bernard Ballinger applied

for a gun permit on the fifteenth. The permit came back yesterday, canceled, from White's sporting goods store. The permit calls for a thirty-two caliber Smith & Wesson, for home protection. Anything else you want?"

"Not now. Thanks." Moran hung up the receiver, and his glittering eyes were mocking.

"You got a gun, Ballinger?"

"I heard what he said." Ballinger's tongue was dry in his mouth. "He's right."

"Home protection," said Moran. That was all he said, but Moran was famous for the significance he could get into simple words.

BALLINGER felt as if he were drowning in a sea of horror. This wasn't real. It couldn't be. Ghastly traps couldn't close upon a man this way. He had to keep his head. But he couldn't keep his voice steady. "That's all I wanted it for," he blurted. "There have been so many holdups lately. I often carry pretty large sums of money."

Even to himself, the statement did not carry conviction.

"Where's the gun now?" Moran demanded.

"In my writing desk."

"Your servant know where it is?"

"Certainly. He put it there."

Moran reached out and pressed a button on his desk. The two men who had brought Ballinger came into the room. "Go back to Ballinger's house and get his gun. Get the box of cartridges he bought with it. Make it snappy."

The policemen went out, and Moran turned back to Ballinger.

"Ballinger, Gearheart was found doubled up on the seat of his car, dead. We had no trouble tracing his movements from the office. At the club, we located four men who heard you and Gearheart quarreling. When Gearheart didn't go into the house after driving in, his servants went out to investigate. They had seen him drive up the entrance with another man they positively identified as you." He turned his head and called loudly. "Okay, Jake."

A police lieutenant came briskly in

from another room and walked up to face Ballinger. His gaze was dispassionate, his voice expressionless. Yet it seemed to Ballinger that he spoke so loudly that the words must be heard from one end of the city to the other.

"Mr. Ballinger, I have a warrant for your arrest for the murder of John Grace Gearheart. I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

BARNEY BALLINGER gaped around at his surroundings. There was nothing unreal about this. It just wasn't serious. It couldn't be. He stared down at the iron cot on which he sat, up at the small high window barricaded by iron bars. He smelled the unfamiliar odors of the jail. He reached down and touched the cold concrete floor.

Then he began to regain his self-control. Accusing him of murdering J. G.! What evidence did they have against him? A hot argument overheard by four men, his purchase of a gun, that he was the last one seen with Gearheart. It sounded like a lot, but Barney knew it wasn't real evidence. It wouldn't stand up in court.

They would have a ballistics expert examine the murder bullet. Barney grinned. He'd like to see that blood-thirsty attorney's face when it was proved that the bullet had come from another gun.

Ballinger lay back on the cot, laughing a little foolishly. It would be so simple after all. But then something made him grip the edge of the cot. His hazel eyes stopped flashing around wildly, went distant with anticipation.

With Gearheart gone, the firm was his! Gearheart's will gave him the firm and practically all the rest of the old man's possessions—

Barney sat upright on the cot, his eyes flashing their old eagerness. The business was his, once he got out of this filthy jail! He could handle the Markheim affair in his own fashion. Too bad old J. G. had had to die, but he was gone, and there was no calling him back. Having a reason to make plans took Barney's mind off his surroundings. Markheim was no problem. If he got a couple of thousand, he'd be satisfied. He'd better be! Then the actual business itself—that was a bit tougher. Barney grinned. With Gearheart's money, there was nothing to worry about.

Suddenly, Ballinger's mind leaped back to that instant in his room. He saw Gearheart as he had stood there. He heard Gearheart's dead voice:

"Barney, I would have saved you this, if I could."

He felt the chill of another world settling over him again, cowing him, washing away all sense of unholy triumph. What had Gearheart meant? Why had he come there?

[Turn Page]



BIG BOY TAKES A TIP

BOB: Say, fellow, are you taking Ex-Lax? Thought that was for women and kids.

JIM: Wrong, Big Boy! I've been taking Ex-Lax for years. It fixes me up fine!



BOB: Oh, yeah! Well, I'm pretty lousy... I need a laxative with a wallop.

JIM: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax tastes good, but it's plenty effective!



LATER

BOB: Thanks for the tip, pal! I tried Ex-Lax and it's great stuff!

JIM: What did I tell you! It's the only laxative we ever use in our family.

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



He couldn't argue that Gearheart hadn't been there. The old man had been incredibly tenacious. Somehow, his return from the grave wasn't as surprising to Barney as it might have been to somebody else. What baffled Barney, drove him almost to madness, was the motive. Gearheart had returned—to warn him! Warn him of what? Something that was going to happen when he got out of jail?

HE DIDN'T get out of jail, then or later. So he hired Ben Metz as counsel. They didn't come any shrewder or more capable than Metz. Barney thought it was as good as over when Metz took his case. He pleaded not guilty, returned to his cell, and was remanded for trial. A few days more in jail, that was all it meant. The bullet still hadn't been reported on.

The day before the trial, Metz came to his cell. Ballinger sat on his cot, smiling cheerfully. Metz stood before him, but there was no answering smile on his worried face.

"I've been doing my best, Barney," he said bluntly. "You'll have to speak frankly to me now. Everything's against you. I might as well tell you that, in case you're feeling too optimistic. Gearheart was too honest to have any dangerous enemies. The way it looks now, you don't have anything on your side, and you're certainly no help to me. Be realistic, will you? You had an argument with him, threatened to put him out of your way. And there's the fact that you're his heir. Open up, Barney. You've got to tell me what you were quarreling about at the club."

Ballinger sobered, shook his head. "I'd only make matters worse if I told you. It really wasn't important, but it'd sound like a perfect motive. Can't you take my word that we'd have patched it up in the morning?"

"Don't be a fool!" Metz snapped impatiently. "There's been a flock of murders committed in the city lately, unsolved murders. The prosecutor, the sheriff, the police, have all been run ragged. They'd sell their eyeteeth to make a conviction. You're making things tough for me. But you're the one who'll suffer. Come on, spill it!

What were you and Gearheart fighting about?"

"We weren't fighting," Barney said obstinately, "and I don't have to tell you. They don't have a case against me. Wait until the trial comes up tomorrow. You'll see the fastest acquittal in history!"

"Yeah?" Metz retorted, summoning the guard. "You should be hanged for plain stupidity!"

Alone in the cell once more, Barney was undismayed. It was just a question of waiting patiently. The only strange thing was the delayed report on the bullet. But even that didn't bother him. They were probably waiting for the trial.

CHAPTER IV

Torment

BUT the trial, when it came, started off ominously. The star witnesses, the four men who had sat at the next table in the club restaurant, weren't plants. Barney saw Metz' grim face turned accusingly on him. His confidence turned slightly sour as one after the other told the same story—the real story. They didn't have the complete details, but that didn't seem necessary. Everybody nodded knowingly when it was revealed that the argument involved millions of dollars.

Barney forced his depression away. There was still the bullet. . . .

Before the ballistics expert was called, though, Barney had to take the stand. The whole court leaned forward. In spite of himself, Barney recoiled before that concentrated, collective stare.

"Mr. Ballinger," the prosecutor began, "this box of cartridges was full when it was delivered to the district attorney. Five bullets were in the gun. But one was missing! Where did you shoot that shell?"

Barney gazed coolly down at the box. He felt much better now. Everything could be explained in a few words.

"I didn't shoot it," he said easily. "The gun hasn't been fired."

"The gun has been examined, Mr. Ballinger. It has been fired. It was also reloaded, after being cleaned quite badly."

Ballinger's face drained. That was a bad break. He had honestly forgotten, but he knew it wouldn't sound like that.

"Oh, yes," he said hastily. "I'm sorry. I tested the sights in the target room before I bought it. The clerk cleaned it before I left the store. He'll verify it."

"Can you prove that was the only time the gun was fired?"

"No," Barney admitted frightenedly. "Of course not."

The prosecutor turned significantly toward the jury.

"What became of that missing shell?" he demanded suddenly.

Barney didn't miss that glance, nor the nod of understanding from every man on the jury. Even the judge had made a brief note. . . .

"I lost it," Barney cried in a loud voice. "I'd bought the gun that morning. I had it in my pocket when I left Gearheart. When I took the gun and the box of cartridges out of my pocket, I stepped down off the pavement—"

"You mean you were reloading right in the street?"

"Uh—yes," Barney confessed. "I thought I might need it. There have been so many murders and holdups lately. The cartridge fell in the gutter and rolled down a sewer grating. But that doesn't matter!" he almost shouted. "Examine the bullet that killed Gearheart. You'll see it didn't come from my gun."

"The bullet passed right through the body, Mr. Ballinger. It was flattened out of shape against the concrete wall of the garage. The only thing the experts could determine was its caliber. It was fired from a thirty-two caliber gun, Mr. Ballinger!"

Stepping down from the chair in a daze, Barney knew he was caught in a trap, doomed. The rest of the trial was a blur of words.

"Gentlemen of the jury," the prosecutor said, centuries later. "There is nothing in this case to inspire the sob

sisters. We find here no crime of passion, no plea of self-defense. The murder of John Grace Gearheart, a sternly honest old man respected by all, was plotted in cold emotion and carried out with ruthless determination.

"I don't have to bore you with a long argument. We know, by the testimony of four reliable men, that Mr. Gearheart stood in Bernard Ballinger's way. This vicious murderer, this hardened criminal, had conceived a dastardly plot involving a fortune. Like the honorable old gentleman that he was, Mr. Gearheart refused to lend his universally respected name to anything so unscrupulous. Therefore, the motive is clear beyond question.

"Ballinger has admitted, by his own testimony, and we have conclusively proved, that the gun was fired by his hand. That the rifling can't be determined is a minor detail.

"The State asks for a directed verdict of murder in the first degree, to be expiated by hanging!"

BALLINGER crouched down in his chair, glaring around wildly. Again he saw those furious nods, those knowing smiles on the twelve smug faces in the jury box. But before them he saw the huge figure of John Grace Gearheart, expanded to twice normal size.

"It is decreed," the dead voice said with infinite regret, "by laws higher than those you and I know, that you walk with horror to save your eternal soul. . . ."

Barney leaped up and fought then, fought like a hunting dog caught in a trap set for predatory wolves. He beat insanely at the brute arms that rushed up from everywhere to hold him down.

"You shall hang by the neck until you are dead. . . ." the judge's tired, bored voice droned impassively.

Barney sank back, defeated, into the arms that were wrapped with crushing force around his chest, his waist, his neck. He had not gambled, yet he had lost everything—including life. And even that was unclear. It would be a filthy death, the death of the vicious outlaw of society. And before that—

There would be the horrible months

of waiting, the carefully calculated torment of locking him in a small cell where he could listen to his own heart-beats ticking away the moments until it would tick no more. . . . There would be the maddening horror of a disgusting, traplike cell that he would even cling to as a refuge against—

The day of ultimate horror! They would march him along the infinitely extended, infinitely short path to the gallows. They would strap his arms and legs, stand him meticulously over the trap, put a black cap over his head and face, a thick, coarse rope behind his ear. . . .

He struck out blindly again, in a fury of terror. But now his hands smashed against steel instead of flesh. He stood frozen. He was back in his cell, without remembering the trip from the court. He had no doubt, now, that he was going mad.

"You must walk with horror to save your soul . . ." old J. G. had said. And at last Barney understood why the dead had returned.

The cell door swung open. He crouched back into a corner, clawing as far into its meager protection as he could.

"It isn't time yet!" he screamed. "You can't take me!"

"Pull yourself together," the warden said quietly. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

His mad, suspicious eyes still on the warden, Barney backed to his cot, angled his tensed body into a stiff sitting position.

"I don't know if you've heard of me before, Ballinger," the warden said. "I've made quite a reputation with my honor system. I'm Tom Craig, the warden who believes in the honor system. I think honor is as strong an instinct in man as—"

"Honor!" Barney cried aghast. The words of the dead would haunt him to the very gallows. . . .

"We've never had a man of your education and intelligence in the death cell before," Craig went on, as if Ballinger had not spoken. "I should warn you that I'm a sort of experimenter. I didn't come here just to waste time. I've never had the opportunity of experimenting with a man

of your caliber. There is a test of honor I want to try for the first time on a highly educated, intelligent man—"

SOMETHING tore loose in Ballinger's brain. He choked back a hysterical urge to laugh. Instead, he began to talk rapidly, a swollen, inarticulate stream that sounded like gibberish even to himself. He had to find expression somehow.

"Isn't that funny?" he blabbered. "God, but it's funny! That's what old J. G., the damned fool, and I were arguing about—honor. He was right all the time. He knew it. I knew it. He wasn't the damned fool; I was. A million dollars look like a lot outside. In here you see what money really amounts to. We quarreled about honor. He said it'd follow me to my death. No, that was horror. Honor, horror—it gets so you don't know which is which. And I didn't even kill him, but I have to swing for it. . . ."

"Stop that!" Craig snapped harshly. "Every murderer who's been in this cell has been innocent. That's what they all say. But I'm not the judge. All I'm supposed to do is keep you here until the end. I don't know if you're innocent or guilty. But that doesn't concern me, you know. Pull yourself together and listen to me."

Ballinger checked the flow of words that still flooded his mouth.

Craig nodded. "That's better. Try to follow me closely. I've made quite a few tests of honor. In spite of the nasty remarks the newspapers make about me, most of my theories have been proved. But they weren't really conclusive. The sense of guilt is a powerful impulse in a guilty man. His hysteria is more an attempt to convince himself of his innocence than to get himself free. Am I clear?"

Ballinger was deadly sober now. This was more of the torment old Gearheart had promised him. Craig's words made just enough sense to shock his mind into realizing what would come next.

"What are you talking about?" he evaded hoarsely.

"Honor," Craig stated in a flat, hard voice.

Barney's teeth snatched at his underlip. He turned his head away. He had known all along that that would be the word. It had to be, for that was the horror he was to walk with for eternity.

"Honor is a positive force," Craig went on. "It's a prime instinct, like hunger, fear, self-preservation. But intellectual rationalization can explain it away, until it is completely submerged, though not entirely strangled. You've been equipped to rationalize it away better than any other man I've had in the death house. You are also a condemned man, a proved murderer. But in making my test, you have nothing to lose. Are you willing?"

"I—I don't understand what you mean," Barney faltered.

He knew it would be another subtle torture, yet he could not fight. It was his destiny to walk with horror.

"Listen. How would you like to stand outside the prison walls again? To see the sunrise again before you die . . . To be a free man for an hour, before the end? . . ."

Ballinger sprang from the edge of his cot. This was no torment! This was opportunity! Instantly, to his shrewd mind there came a dozen plans, escape, suicide, clever trickery.

"You—know what it—would mean to me," he whispered.

"I think I do," Craig admitted. "That was why I offered you freedom for an hour." He leaned forward intently, his eyes burning hypnotically at Ballinger. "There's a large field outside the prison. It's a beautiful field, where even free men might love

to wander. But to a man who is free for a single hour, it would be a memory of the loveliest thing on earth. It is entirely covered with the simplest, most honest flower that has ever bloomed. Ballinger, do you care for—red clover?"

CHAPTER V

Expiation

BARNEY BALLINGER felt something cold wrap itself about his heart. Sheer hysterical revulsion kept him dumb. Craig continued as if he had not noticed Barney's suddenly white, agonized face.

"When the dew is on the clover, an intellectual man, clever at rationalizing the most elementary decencies, a man who can talk himself into believing viciousness is right—you—you can walk there. Clover is a clean flower. Walking among clover, you can wash your soul clean to meet eternity."

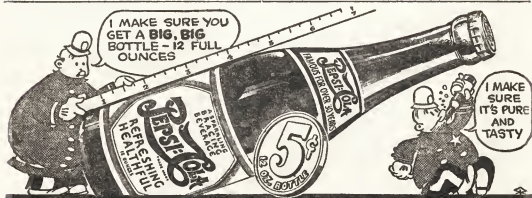
Barney had no illusions now. He knew the offer that was about to come was merely another spike in his torture wheel.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked in a low voice.

"Go to the middle of the field, return promptly when you hear the signal for your execution. In return, for that promise, I will give you your hour of freedom."

The condemned man struggled to

[Turn Page]



his feet. His throat was taut and strangled, as if the thick, harsh rope had already settled there, but he forced out the painful words.

"I give you my word of—of honor. What is the signal?"

"One short blast of the siren."

Ballinger stared at the cold, gray wall when the warden left. The stone wall was cold and gray, but his flesh was white and frozen. In his cell there was the terrible silence of death. Daylight slid by the tiny barred window high in the wall, and the square of distant light became a sinister black patch on the cold, gray stone.

He sat unmoving, waiting rigidly for the visitor he knew would come. This horror could not be enough. No horror would be enough for him to endure. There must be the dead to point up his suffering.

But the dead did not return. He had only the horror that crawled in his own mind to keep him company. And no man ever had more horror before him than Barney entertained within himself that eternally long night of a thousand years.

"What happens to the body," he thought all that night, "is of little moment. The soul is the all-important. But it must be clean—clean for eternity!" One thought, one single thought. . . .

He didn't sleep, but his morass of horror was so deep that he missed the clink of keys, the groan of the door as it opened.

"It's almost day," Craig said gently, yet somehow insidiously.

Barney stood up. Stiff and awkward, he followed Craig out of the cell, down long corridors, through heavy steel doors, to the very last door of the prison—the gate in the high wall. Silently, the warden unlocked that, too.

Utterly motionless, he stood with his tired face raised to the darkened lightening sky. No shackles bound his feet, no bars kept him from walking as far as he wanted in a straight line. Yet he stood without moving, without thinking—breathing deeply of air that bore no sharp mustiness, air that was clean with the smell of—

Clover!

With a sobbing cry he started running, stumbling blindly, dragging his feet through what he knew were large, lovely red-and-white flowers. He ran until he remembered. He had given his word of—honor. He had promised not to go beyond the middle of the field.

BUT that was only a promise, he rationalized. This wasn't a game. It meant a life against a word, escape against frightful death.

He staggered, fell flat on his face among the fragrant blossoms. When he got to his hands and knees, his mouth was wet with intolerably sweet dew.

Slowly, then, he sank back, sat on the cool, moist ground. He tried with frantic desperation to be shrewd and calculating, but he felt the sweep of infinity about him. These simple, beautiful—and honest—flowers would die, yet they would live again. Above were the everlasting stars. When they died, it was not forever.

And, low in the east, the red glimmer of warm life crept warily above the horizon. The black forces of death retreated slowly, fighting every inch of the way, retreating behind clouds to gather their minions. But life was too strong. Rudely it shouldered its way, until all the world was bright, alive and singing.

Now he could look around and see what lay on all sides. A gay carpet of red and white stretched clear to the trees at the end of the field, and to the wall of the prison behind him. But he did not look back.

There was so much beauty everywhere—everywhere but behind. Did the fools think he would give up life, loveliness, happiness for—the drone of a chaplain, a black cap over his face, a rope like a hawser of steel shavings tied in a huge knot and pressing hard behind his ear. . . .

Ballinger screamed. He lurched erect, broke into a shambling run, one hand flung up convulsively to protect his throat.

He realized now what the experiment was. It hadn't been Craig's idea. It was the voice of the dead, condemn-

ing him to endless horror before the final, the ultimate horror.

Hanging stretched men's necks to twice their normal length. Sometimes the neck wasn't mercifully broken, and they hung there and slowly strangled. Before, the knowledge had been casual and dim. Now it was incisively sharp—sometimes the head was pulled clean off the body!

him that his soul should have been like the sweet, simple, honest blossom that reclaimed the barren soil.

FROM somewhere above, he heard the sputtering drone of a motor. He sat upright, listening. The drone grew to a roar that faltered uncertainly. Then he saw the plane as it circled, came down in a slow spiral,

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IN

THE HUNCHBACK OF HANOVER

A Complete Weird Novelet

By **DON ALVISO**



One of the **13** Gripping Tales in the Next Issue

Walk with horror to save his soul? He died from breath to breath, yet each death was less horrible than the one that followed! And he was innocent! *Innocent!*

Gearheart knew that. Why didn't he show himself to others, tell them Barney hadn't killed him? Barney couldn't expect mercy. He had to suffer incredible torment before dying the filthy death of society's vermin.

This last hour among the clover was to be the last touch. It was to teach

landed not a hundred yards away. Ballinger raced toward it.

"Trouble?" he asked tersely of the pilot clambering from the cockpit.

"Nothing much. I'll have it fixed up in ten minutes."

Ballinger watched, offering casual suggestions, till the minor fault was repaired and the pilot climbed back into the plane. The pilot gave him a curious, interested glance.

"You seem to know ships. Ever fly one?"

"Yes. Meuse. Argonne."

"Yeah? So was I! Come up for a spin with an old buddy?"

Ballinger started violently. He realized again that around him were hills and trees, clover blooms. Behind was prison. His face whitened. The pilot was offering him life. Speed beyond the reach of a guard's gun! Flight beyond the Border to life, instead of the gallows and death.

His heart surged in one last wild demand for life. He stepped toward the plane, one hand reaching toward the fuselage.

"Thanks—"

Then, through the peace of the morning, piercing the drone of the motor, over the prison walls came a single blast of the siren.

Ballinger's hand dropped to his side. He lifted his head, to meet the pilot's curious probing gaze.

"Thanks—no. I have an appointment."

The pilot shook his head regretfully. He waved and revved up the motor. Across the sun's brilliant rim, the plane mounted on a long upward slant.

Ballinger drew a deep breath. Never had he held himself more erect. But the youth and the eagerness were gone out of him. He was armored forever in a spirit-hush that must forbid all intrusion, borne upward by the deep slow flood waters of stern soul-cleansing. His hazel eyes were stilled to awe by the horror they had looked upon. He did not know it yet, but his hair had gone completely white. He lifted his face, smiled up at the sky. Then he spoke aloud.

"I'm coming. You were right, J. G."

Across the wide field he went, eyes steadily to the fore, an innocent man walking to his death solely upon his word of honor. Just before he reached the prison gate, he bent down to grasp a handful of the clover blooms at his feet. He went on, carrying them. The gate swung open.

He stepped inside, to find Craig waiting for him. He felt the cool breath of a strange peace upon him, as he held up the little bunch of clover blooms.

"Warden, could you let me keep

these blooms, when the time comes?"

"The time is now." Craig's voice held something deep and singing. "The governor came in that plane, Ballinger. He and I have been watching you for the last thirty minutes. He said that a guilty man would have kept going—in the dark. He said that if you came back, you came to a pardon. Governor!"

A tall man stepped from the shadows beyond the warden. Ballinger couldn't see him clearly. Everything whirled before his gaze. What was Craig saying? Or was it Craig? Somebody—saying—

"Are you going to faint again? Buck up, pal. I know it's a rotten break, but everybody's got to die some time."

BALLINGER forced his eyes open. Two men in police uniform were bending over him.

He was in his own room. His startled Japanese servant stood in the doorway. His heavy blue silk dressing gown was tangled around his legs. The policeman nearest him, gripping his arm to offer support, stared in stunned awe.

"My God! His hair's gone white! We didn't mean to shock you like that! Who'd 'a' dreamt you thought that much of old Gearheart? You got one thing to be glad about. They grabbed the guy that shot him. Got him in the can right now, gun and all. He'll sure swing. Come out of it, Mister. Bill, you better get him a drink of something."

"Whiskey," said Ballinger. "Right there in that cabinet. I'm all right now. I'll just—get over to my chair."

The policeman helped him into it. He took the flask the other officer hastily handed him. His fingers were so cold that they gripped the smooth glass with difficulty.

An hour later he was still sitting in the same chair, quiet, poised, the dignified Barney Ballinger you see today. His white hair was combed neatly. He was facing Joel Markheim.

"And that is all of it, Markheim," he ended. "I have withheld nothing. I realize quite clearly what happened. J. G., from his vantage point on the

other side, brought me face to face with horror to save my soul. He made me live through that entire ghastly sequence, all in that instant when I lay on the floor in a faint. Come around to the office tomorrow and we'll make out a contract. You don't need a contract. I give you my word. But it's business to draw up a contract. I'll see you tomorrow, then."

He sat motionless in his chair. As Markheim went out of the room, his gaze lifted to the portrait of Gearheart above his mantel. That is the same portrait under which he keeps a little vase filled with clover.

You say I'm a loyal champion of Barney Ballinger? I hope so. I should be.

I am Joel Markheim.

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I KILLED HIM! REMEMBER?

By C. WILLIAM HARRISON

Author of "Canyon of No Return," "Rattler Retribution," etc.



My own spear lanced out at Zulok

*Modern Science Halts Its
March to Watch Men Fight
Back in the Dawn of Time!*

I DON'T remember just where I first met Ivan Kurnman. It may have been at the Tech Institute where I was a student of anthropology, or perhaps later at the Science Club, I'm not sure.

He was tall, on the darkish side, with eyes that were like burning coals and made you feel as though you were under his microscope when he looked at you. He was too damnably handsome, affable and yet strangely aloof—one of those men you meet and feel



that you've known and disliked a long time.

But maybe that was because every time I saw him he was with Lois Norton.

Lois Norton was different from all other women reporters I had known. Most of them were tall and lanky, with a crowbar voice and a leaning toward mannish clothes. I never did like mannish women, and that's why I liked Lois Norton when I first saw her being towed along by Ivan Kurnman.

She wasn't too tall, and her voice was low, almost lilting when Kurnman introduced us in his condescending manner of "Fame vs. Nobody." Kurnman was like that. He'd been that way when we were students at Tech and later at Yale—he the scientist and I merely his assistant. Not that he didn't have his share of brains. He had more than that.

He was brilliant, the owner of a long string of degrees and a record in biology and metaphysics that made anything he did news. So it was no wonder that Lois Norton's paper assigned her to Ivan Kurnman when Kurnman became head of the Science Club's anthropological expedition to the Dordogne in France, a year before the war.

But Lois had known Kurnman far longer and better than I had suspected. I didn't find that out until that day when we took our journey back through Time. It all started in the big, rambling seventeenth century French house Kurnman had leased while we did our work around the Dordogne. I met Lois at the door.

"Why, John!" she cried.

That's my name, John Thalén.

"Of all people!" she went on. "I didn't expect to find you here."

I smiled. That is, my lips smiled, but there was no smile inside me. A pleasant note of surprise was in Lois' voice, but not what I would have liked there. I held the door for her, closed it after her and took her wraps.

"I suppose I'm rather indetachable from Professor Kurnman by now," I assured her, when she was seated. "A sort of Man Friday, you know. Noth-

ing in the way of big news, but I kid myself into thinking I earn my board and keep."

She flushed slightly, and lowered her eyes. She nipped her lower lip between her teeth, and began tugging nervously at the long white gloves she wore. Strange things for an ace newspaper woman to be wearing, I thought vaguely—those gloves.

"John, I didn't mean—"

I laughed, trying to force humor into my voice.

"Don't take me seriously, Lois. I'm a little irritable, I suppose. Work, you know. Damnably long hours, the way Kurnman drives us." By "us" I meant Sears and Wiegel, Kurnman's other two assistants.

LOIS looked up and stopped biting her lip.

"I understand, John," she said quickly. "But I didn't expect to find you here. They didn't tell me who was on the expedition when I got the assignment. And the way you answered me, I thought—well, that you thought I wasn't glad to see you. You know what I mean. That—" Her voice faltered.

"That you planned on meeting Kurnman here alone?" I finished for her.

She opened her mouth to speak, closed it and nodded.

"That is what I thought. It's the truth, isn't it?"

She nodded again, a little jerkily, still tugging on the fingers of her gloves.

"Yes, but not the way you think." She hesitated, then her voice went on hurriedly. "John, I know how you feel about me. I've known for a long time. And if you can only understand—"

Something jumped inside me. I didn't stop to analyze it. I don't suppose many anthropologists are gifted in sifting and culling their own emotions.

I moved toward her, blood warming in my veins.

"You knew? I tried to hide it, but I guess I'm not very good at that sort of thing. Work with the dead all the

time, you know." I laughed a little shakily. "Lois—"

Then her left glove came off, and I saw the ring she wore. It was a large diamond—too large, I thought, like something Kurnman would have given her. And then suddenly I knew Kurnman *had* given it to her. It was in her eyes, in the faint pallor that crept over her cheeks. And in her words that came hollowly to my ears.

"I'm sorry, John. It's been this way for a long time. Before I ever met you. Ivan and I became engaged just before he went away to the university. I—"

Kurnman came in then, barging through the study door in his self-important way. I was glad he had come. Why, I didn't know, but this time I was glad. He crossed the room in long, quick strides, dark eyes glowing with strange lights.

He kissed Lois. She colored slightly, but he didn't seem to notice it. I could tell that he hardly knew that he had kissed her, as he turned to me.

"Thalen, I've hit on it at last," he boomed. There was exultation in his voice, an exultation that seemed almost mad.

"Five weeks I've worked in my lab alone, and three years before that. What I've found at last will make the name of Ivan Kurnman—"

HE BROKE off, turned swiftly back to Lois.

"Lois, you'll go with us, of course?"

Her eyes widened, flickered from Kurnman to me and then back to Kurnman.

"Go with you?" she repeated. "Why, Ivan, I don't know. Go where with you?"

He laughed vibrantly, head thrown back, chest swelling, his voice bounding and rebounding about the oak paneled walls of the study.

"Almost like a stage climax, this! Thalen, the skeptical anthropologist, going along as witness. Lois Norton, the newspaper woman who will flash the news to the world. Thalen, you think I'm crazy, don't you?"

I didn't try to dodge the truth. I didn't like him, and he knew it.

"I've wondered a long time, Kurnman, and that's speaking frankly. What the devil are you raving about?"

He said it then, voice lowered almost to a whisper, dark eyes glowing as if some inner fire were flaming behind them.

"Thalen, you'll make the trip with me. You're the anthropologist, even if I am the head of this expedition. And of course Lois will come. She wouldn't miss this story for the world. Where are we going? I'll tell you! We're going back to the days when we were Cro-Magnards, back across twenty-five thousand years to the days when we were the dawn men!"

"We're doing what?" And then I knew it. Ivan Kurnman was crazy! Not a lunatic, but a madman perhaps with more brains and science than any normal person could possess. Genius, mad genius.

He laughed again, dark eyes glowing. Lois Norton spoke up nervously then, her glance wavering from Kurnman to me.

"Ivan, you've been working too hard. You've got to rest."

He stopped laughing abruptly, his face still lighted with mad triumph.

"And now my fiancée thinks I'm crazy! But I'm not, Lois. You'll find that out soon enough. What I've discovered will enable us to make the trip back to the days when we were Cro-Magnards. We will be able to record the hidden pages of history, those of any era we wish to visit. We can— But come on. I'll show you."

Nothing could have stopped Ivan Kurnman in that moment. He caught Lois by the arm, motioned me after him, then led off through the house. I followed, telling myself grimly that if Kurnman was as mad as he appeared, he would have a lot of trouble getting Lois and me to fall in with his wild idea. Wild idea? Somehow I wasn't sure. And, too, I was afraid.

The back door of the house gave out onto the rear yard. It was sunny there, quiet with the ceaseless cackle of hens in the chicken yard at one side, the chirp of birds scratching in the small garden beyond. A cow loped in the distance, the sound float-

ing across the rolling hills on the warm breeze that fanned our faces.

But these were things of which I was hardly aware. I was on Kurnman's heels, grimly measuring the strength of his powerful body. Lois didn't try to dislodge his grip around her arm, but followed in running steps, pale face turned up toward him.

He led down the hill that sloped off from the rear yard, following a path that was studded with rock and overgrown here and there with scrubby little bushes. The path steepened at the bottom of the hill, then swung along the bank of a creek that the summer had dried into lazy pools of stagnant water.

Many times I had followed this path, sometimes with Kurnman, but mostly with Sears and Wiegel to the site where we were making our excavations. Then Kurnman led off from the path, pushing up a steep incline that was thick with bushes that screened the upper lands off from the creek bank below. I knew then where Kurnman was heading—toward the small cave we had discovered weeks before.

BUT there was nothing in the cave that we had been able to find, not even picture-writing that would have told us the cavern had once been inhabited by primitive man. I lengthened my strides to keep up with Kurnman. Up ahead, Lois was sliding in the loose dirt underfoot, and Kurnman almost carried her in his impatience.

Then the slope leveled off, and we were at the mouth of the cave. Kurnman halted there, released Lois and stepped to one side, pulling a small leather case from his pocket. His dark face was beaded with sweat, and veins swelled and throbbed in his throat. Somehow his dark eyes reminded me of orange fires glowing in the depths of twin furnaces. Mad eyes!

"I picked this place because we won't be disturbed," Kurnman said swiftly. "It won't take long, this trip. One hour, or perhaps two. I couldn't figure the time element out accurately—that is, our present time.

I'll have that data when we get back."

"Now look here, Kurnman—"

I stepped forward. Kurnman was bigger, heavier than I, but if it came to the worst I was determined to make a good fight of it. I could see inside the case he had opened now. The leather box quivered in his shaking hands. There was a large vial of colorless liquid inside, and a hypodermic needle. That was all, and yet he had said we were going "back through time."

He saw me coming and stiffened, lean muscles knotting along his jaw.

"Thalen, don't try to stop me! I've worked too long to be blocked now by you or any other man. You're coming with me on this trip; you and Lois, too. I need you both. There'll be no danger, if you're afraid."

Something in Lois Norton's eyes stopped me, and I stood there, staring at Kurnman narrowly.

"All right," I said. "But maybe you'd better tell us more about this before we go too far. We have that privilege, you know."

He motioned us to sit down, then began pacing back and forth impatiently. Finally, he halted, turned on us.

"I can't tell you all of it. There'll be time for that later. What matters is that I've found a means of taking us back to the days when we were Cro-Magnards, living in this valley thousands of years ago. Thalen, you don't believe in metempsychosis, do you? No, I can see that. But I do!"

He paused, then went on almost harshly.

"For years I've studied metaphysics and biochemistry. I've always believed in metempsychosis—the passing of souls at death into another body—and now I can prove it to be a fact. Thalen, we never actually die. When our body-shell ceases to live, our soul simply moves into another embryo which grows into another form.

"As I can prove shortly, the events of our previous life are transferred to our new brain. Up until now, we've called these happenings 'back to life' occasionally and termed them instinct, without knowing exactly what

it was. Actually, it was an experience we had in a previous life which had been buried in the subconscious brain."

I broke in skeptically. "Then you're trying to say we began our life back in the Cro-Magnard era, and lived over and over again until this present time."

HE NODDED quickly, lean jaw hard.

"Maybe it does sound fantastic, but so did the wireless, the airplane—everything else big until it was proved. My discovery is something of the nature of what is commonly called truth serum, the chemical which is sometimes used in police circles to obtain a confession from a suspect.

"My serum dulls the conscious brain even more effectively than truth serum; it brings the subconscious brain to life. My serum is injected under the skin, and in a matter of seconds we are reliving our previous lives over again in our memory. Logical, isn't it?"

I shook my head grimly. "Not to me. What about the increase in the population of today? Neither the Cro-Magnards nor any of the primitive races populated the earth very much. If what you say is right, we'd have only a few scattered races on earth today."

Kurnman began his restless pacing again.

"Not in the least. There's only one way this increase in population can be accounted for. The souls in being transferred to another body become split; that is, going to more than one body. Twins, you know—triplets, quadruplets, and over a period of twenty-five thousand years this would mean a great increase in the population."

I snorted in disbelief. "And if you are right, which I don't believe, how do you know we'd go back to the same tribe? Maybe we were Cro-Magnards, and maybe we were Cro-Magnons, Heidelbergers, Piltowns, even Neanderthals!"

Kurnman scowled, lips thinning. "Maybe," he snapped. "That can only

be settled by test, but we are all three alike in physiognomy. And we are going to test my time serum, no matter what argument you put up. I tried it this morning, just a little, and there's no ill effect on the body that I could notice."

"And did it work?"

He nodded, shoving the hypo needle into the colorless liquid in the vial. He looked up, dark eyes hard.

"It did. The dose I took only sent me back to the medieval days. I saw myself briefly as I was then, *an archer in King Richard's army!*"

There was fear in the eyes of Lois Norton when she looked at me. I got up, moving between Lois and Kurnman as the man stepped toward her. He halted, face going dark under rushing hot blood. Veins throbbed in his throat, and muscles rippled taut over his powerful body. His voice came in a low tumble.

"Thalen, you'd better stand back. I won't be stopped, I tell you. Lois is the first, then you, and after that, I, myself. We'll all take this trip together. Now get back out of the way," he growled.

"Like hell I will!"

I moved forward. There wasn't much I could do, but I tried. I swung my right fist hard, but I didn't have a chance. Trained boxer that he was, Kurnman shrugged off the blow, moving in, his left fist smashing out. It shocked into my middle, and I staggered backward. Lois screamed faintly through the roaring in my ears, then that fist landed again, full on the point of my chin. I went down, dazed, all the air exploded from my lungs.

AGAIN, as if from a distance, I heard Lois scream. I tried to get up, then suddenly knew that Kurnman was straddling my body. The hypo needle in his hand shunted off a thin splinter of sunlight as it pierced my skin. Liquid drained from the vial, and almost instantly I felt as if my blood had changed to liquid fire.

My already dazed senses reeled. For an instant I knew stark fear, then a white haze seemed to spin down over me, dulling all conscious thought.

Kurnman faded out of sight. Pictures flickered with kaleidoscopic swiftness across my brain—pictures of fighting men who gripped ancient muskets; pictures of flashing sabers, gypsies dancing before armored men.

Then the swift panorama moved on with speed that increased to a shaft of spinning white. And as if a figment of my imagination, I heard Kurnman's faint voice.

"Back to the Cro-Magnard days—twenty-five thousands years..."

* * * * *

Something screamed overhead. It was a harsh, throat-rending sound that pierced the afternoon, still to be caught and echoed by the high rocks that bordered the creek.

I looked up, gripping the long-shafted stone ax tighter. A bird wheeled overhead, swooped down toward me, only to lift upward again swiftly as I waved my ax at it. A huge bird, it was, with black membranous wings and bright, lidless eyes. It swung higher, then soared off toward the black basalt cliffs looming to the south.

It had been hot that day, and I was glad to rest a moment in the gloaming chill. Lae-Tor came up beside me, panting slightly from the long day's run. She threw herself down on the sunburned grass, still holding to her light hunting spear.

I watched her, even as I kept guard. Ahead were the forests, great, towering, fern-sprayed trees where the Hairy Ones lived. Not often did the Hairy Ones leave their forests, but still I watched. And closer at hand were the tall grasses that hid Bortu, the tiger; and Kimba, the lion. Beyond lay the swamps and marshy lands that were the feeding grounds of Meeno, the mammoth.

And still I could see Lae-Tor on the ground beside me, her slender, golden body stretched out in rest. Three days Lae-Tor and I had been away from our home caves, scouting to the north where the Dark Ones lived.

It was the tenth moon, the time when the Dark Ones came down from the high lands in search of mates.

And so Lae-Tor and I had gone out to watch the Dark Ones. For if we were not on guard the Dark Ones would attack us, kill off our men and carry our women away with them to their caves in the highlands.

Lae-Tor looked up at me, her eyes blue and calm.

"We must not wait long, Wan-Aitze," she said slowly. "We have seen the Dark Ones leave their caves. Soon they will be gathering to fight us. We must reach our homes and warn our men. We must hurry, Wan-Aitze."

I nodded, swinging up my ax in my right hand. My left hand gripped my long spear with its narrow flint head.

"And when they come, this time we will be ready," I answered her. "Come. We go on now."

She stood up, and we ran side by side through the thick grasses that matted the valley floor. It was good to feel the cool, chill wind blowing into our faces after the heat of the day. As I ran, my eyes traveled the gently rolling ground before us.

ONCE, far to one side, I saw Bortu, the tiger, slipping toward us through the tall grasses. We lengthened our strides, and Bortu halted, watching us silently. Miles slipped by. We came upon a herd of small deer that seemed to vomit from the bushes ahead of us.

I wanted to give chase, for Moola was good eating, but Lae-Tor held me back. We ran on.

Then Lae-Tor halted quickly, motioning ahead of us. We were at the edge of the swampy lands now, and I could see three Meeno not far away, feeding on the marsh bushes. We watched them quietly.

They stopped feeding abruptly, stood there outlined against the dun sky, huge, shaggy mammoths, massive bulks swaying slightly as they held their trunks high, sniffing the air. Then one of them trumpeted until it seemed the very ground shook, and they turned back to their feeding.

"We go now," I said softly.

We ran on and on, until I caught the scent of the home caves. We

slowed our speed, again running side by side. Smoke writhed upward from the campfires at the mouth of the caves where the women worked and the children played. A cry went up as the women saw us. From all sides men came forward, their golden bodies glowing in the light of the fading sun.

"You tell the women," I said to Lae-Tor. "I will prepare the men."

Voices greeted me excitedly as I halted in front of the men. Our tribe didn't number many, but our men were strong. And we had strong spears and heavy axes with which to fight when the Dark Ones came.

"We must be ready," I told them quickly. "Already the Dark Ones are coming to steal our women. Lae-Tor will take all the women to the small cave, and we will be ready when the Dark Ones come."

The men gathered their spears and axes swiftly, then ran to the mouth of the cave where Lae-Tor had taken the women. We waited then, talking little, our eyes sweeping the valley to the north. Then one of the men spoke up quickly.

"They come!"

True, the Dark Ones were coming. Almost like shadows they sped against the cobalt swells of the valley, black hair streaming like manes, heavy spears and axes flashing in the twilight.

"They are many, we are few," one of the men beside me said softly. "But we will fight well."

The Dark Ones swiftly came closer, tall, silent men, with powerful, hair-matted bodies and lean, dark faces. I set my eyes on the one in the lead. His features were like chiseled stone, his eyes like glowing coals.

"Zulok," I whispered.

And then I stepped forward. The Dark Ones halted, then moved toward us warily. I lengthened my strides, ignoring the voices behind me that bade me to come back.

"Zulok," I called. "We talk first." Zulok paced ahead of his men, smiling broadly.

"We talk, Wan-Aitze, and then we fight," he boomed. "We, the Dark

Ones, have come to take our mates."

I faced Zulok not more than a spear's length between us. Something in my mind leaped, as I stared at him. It was as if a vagrant thought had caught a spark, kindled it to flash the name Kurnman across my brain. Kurnman? The name meant nothing. Or did it? I wasn't sure.

ZULOK'S white teeth flashed against his dark skin as he talked.

"If you fight, Wan-Aitze, many of your men will be killed. Give up your women and there will be peace—until the next mating season."

"Give up?" I laughed. "We will never give up, Zulok. Last year we were not prepared for you. You killed many of our men, and left only the old women behind. This time we are ready. We will guard our women even if we are all killed."

Zulok's smile vanished. "So it will be, then," he rumbled.

He stepped back. I returned to the men who guarded the cave where the women chattered in fear and excitement. A moment passed, then the Dark Ones came forward. Like shadows half seen in the dusky light, they charged.

We met them bravely, spears flashing out, axes swinging. Twice we beat them back, and they left dying men behind them. A spear had raked my side, baring the ribs, but I knew no pain. I was fighting, and it was good to fight. And I knew that Lae-Tor was close behind me, her hunting spear ready if any of the Dark Ones broke through our thinning line.

I could hear her low voice almost in my ear.

"We are ready, Wan-Aitze," she called. "They will get no women this time."

Again the Dark Ones came, their powerful, hair-matted bodies bunched close together. The men beside me met them bravely, but we numbered only a few. The line broke. I jumped back, trying to block the mouth of the cave with my body. Ahead of me, men yelled or fought silently, died still clutching their spears and axes.

Then I saw Zulok standing before

me, spear upraised flint ax swinging in his right hand.

"Wan-Aitze, this time I kill!" he boomed.

He leaped forward. His spear point caught me in the shoulder, jerked back, tearing through bone and flesh. My side seemed covered with a sheet of fire that poured from the gaping wound. I heard Lac-Tor's scream behind me.

"Wan-Aitze!"

Her voice seemed to give me strength. I caught the blow Zulok aimed at my head with the shaft of my ax. The heavy shaft splintered in my hand, but it stopped the flint head of his ax in mid-air. Then I pressed forward, full into the point of Zulok's outthrust spear.

My own spear lanced out. It struck flesh, went on and on as I fell. And again, as night closed over me, I heard Lac-Tor's scream, this time distantly, faintly.

"Wan-Aitze—"

* * * * *

"He's coming around now," a voice said above me. "Miss Norton, too, I think."

I opened my eyes on dazzling sunlight. I closed my eyes again, trying to gather my senses, but they seemed dulled, frayed. I was alive, and yet I should be dead. Zulok's spear had pierced my body just before my own spear thrust had killed him. And yet I was still alive.

There were men bending over me. Something told me they were Sears and Wiegel, Ivan Kurnman's other two assistants. Kurnman—Zulok! I felt tired, damnably tired. And the other man, the one in uniform, he must be the prefect of police from Bergerac.

And Lac-Tor—

I OPENED my eyes again. Lois Norton was stirring fretfully where she lay near me. Once I heard her voice, but it didn't seem to come from her lips. It was almost unreal, as if muffled by the age of twenty-five thousand years.

"Wan-Aitze, I—" Her voice drifted into silence, as her eyes opened. She

looked around dazedly, saw me, smiled faintly.

"Wan-Aitze," she whispered. Then she broke off short. "John, he was you! I remember. You were fighting, and Zulok—"

Then I, too, knew. She had been different then, unchanged by these many thousand years of civilization. But she was still as lovely; wide-eyed, a little pale and drawn, but lovely.

"And you," I murmured, "you were Lac-Tor. Yes, Lois, you were—"

Then again Sears and Wiegel were before me, their eyes puzzled, nodding jerkily now and then to each other in significant glances. I laughed shortly. They thought we were crazy. They thought—but no wonder! I had thought Ivan Kurnman crazy!

Then the prefect of police, a short, round-faced man, thrust into view, his eyes like gimlets.

"*Monsieur*," he said crisply. "All this strange talk—I do not understand. These gentlemen, they missed you from the house and called me. We found you here, maybe asleep, talking in strange tongues. *Monsieur* Kurnman, he is dead. His heart fails, the doctor says. What happened, if I may ask?"

My eyes went to Lois, then back to the three men staring at us. It was insane to tell them, but I didn't try to hold back the words.

"Kurnman," I said slowly, "is dead because I killed him!"

Hans Wiegel choked his breath back audibly.

"*You!* John, you killed him! But how? Why?"

"He was trying to steal Lac-Tor from me. I killed him with my spear, gentlemen."

A look of wonderment crept over the faces of Sears and Wiegel. The Prefect of Police crinkled his brow.

"You killed *Monsieur* Kurnman with a spear! But there are no marks, no blood. And the doctor reports—"

"Maybe he died of heart failure today," I broke in quietly. "But twenty-five thousand years ago, I killed him with a spear. You can believe that, gentlemen. Miss Norton and I have

been back to our Cro-Magnard days. Kurnman was Zulok, a Dark One then, and I killed him when he tried to steal Lae-Tor—Lois—from me."

Hans Wiegel's eyes went to Sears, and he nodded briefly. I could almost see the word that flashed from Wiegel's mind to Sears. Crazy! Raving lunatics, both John Thalen and Lois Norton. Killed Ivan Kurnman thousands of years ago with a spear? Fantastic! Hans Wiegel practically said as much.

"John, you've had some sort of a shock. I don't know what, but you can tell us later. We found an empty vial and hypo needle near Kurnman's body. If you care to tell us about it—"

"I'll tell you now," I answered grimly. "We aren't crazy, Wiegel. We're perfectly sane. We went back to the days when we were Cro-Magnards, I tell you. Metempsychosis, you know—Kurnman's serum which he injected in us, and in himself, too. I guess the shock of it killed him. Too strong a dose for his system, maybe. But it took us back. We—"

THEN another thought struck me, and I looked doubtfully at Lois Norton. *Maybe we were crazy!* Maybe it had all been an hallucination.

But it had all been so real, so vivid! That fight in the caves, and before that the saber-toothed tiger, the mammoths feeding in the marshes. Why, the swamps had been near the site where we were making our twentieth-century excavations. Maybe we would find bones later. If we didn't—

The cave! I looked around me almost wildly. It was hard to picture it as it had been thousands of years ago, but it was the same. That rugged limestone spur that had hung suspended above—time had weathered it, eroded it until it was now part of the grass-covered hill. But it was the ledge; the cave was the same.

I jerked my eyes back to Wiegel and Sears.

"In there," I said swiftly. "You'll have to excavate, maybe deep, maybe not so far. I can't tell how much that cave has changed since the day I killed Kurnman there. But some place in there, you will find his bones.

"I'm sure of it! And you'll find the head of my spear, a long narrow flint head, with a reddish tinge near the tip. Dig in there, Wiegel, and if you don't find the remains of a Cro-Magnard—"

Fear struck me then, and I didn't say any more. If they didn't find the remains of Zulok's body, if they didn't find a spear head. . . .

Lois Norton is Lois Thalen now. We were married shortly after we got back to New York. We didn't tell our story to the papers; and Sears and Wiegel, because something akin to fear held their tongues, said nothing. The world wouldn't have believed, anyhow.

But we found the bones of a Cro-Magnard in that little cave. Not many bones, but enough for identification. And with that scattering of aged bones—we found a spear head with a reddish tinge near the point I named.

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The Dead Take Their Own Vengeance!

The Gallows Geist

By
EARLE DOW

*Author of "Death Docks at Dawn,"
"Tractor Convoy," etc.*

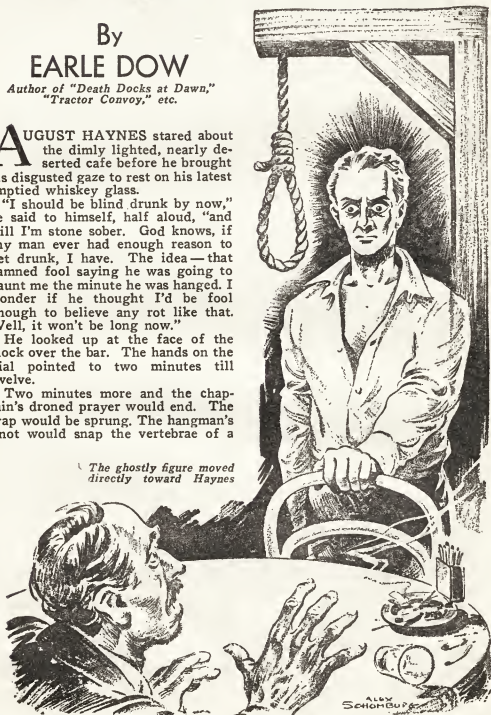
AUGUST HAYNES stared about the dimly lighted, nearly deserted cafe before he brought his disgusted gaze to rest on his latest emptied whiskey glass.

"I should be blind drunk by now," he said to himself, half aloud, "and still I'm stone sober. God knows, if any man ever had enough reason to get drunk, I have. The idea—that damned fool saying he was going to haunt me the minute he was hanged. I wonder if he thought I'd be fool enough to believe any rot like that. Well, it won't be long now."

He looked up at the face of the clock over the bar. The hands on the dial pointed to two minutes till twelve.

Two minutes more and the chaplain's droned prayer would end. The trap would be sprung. The hangman's knot would snap the vertebrae of a

*The ghostly figure moved
directly toward Haynes*



man's neck. Les Reder's soul would be hurled into eternity.

Suddenly, Haynes laughed aloud. He felt better already. A man always felt better when the waiting was nearly over, regardless of what he was waiting for. And when he was waiting for another man to die, it was bound to be doubly so.

Haynes raised a hand and signaled the waiter to bring him another drink. He knew what had been the matter with him. It was the strain of the five months, during which he had waited the day and hour when Les Reder would be executed. The time had seemed like five years, because of that insane threat hovering over him. Now he could chuckle. No sane man would be ass enough to give such an idea a serious second thought.

Alky, the waiter, came hurrying up with Haynes' eighth glass of whiskey. He grinned as he set the glass down before Haynes, and gestured significantly at the clock over the bar.

"It's about time for you to start being haunted, ain't it, August? About thirty seconds more, and Les Reder is going to take his last dive. I wonder how long it would take a spook to get over here from San Quentin?"

HAYNES took a swallow of the whiskey. He set the glass down on the table with a thump.

"Well, all he's got to do is come about twenty miles down the bay," he said, almost lightly. "I guess everybody in San Francisco knows about that nutty crack he made."

"Anybody that can read a newspaper," Alky agreed cheerfully. "A lot of people was at the trial, too. Everybody that could get in. I was there myself. Sure was one of the noisiest cases we ever had in San Francisco, that Reder case. But then it always makes a lot of noise when a cop gets killed."

"Yeah," Haynes said. He took another swallow of whiskey.

Alky was in a garrulous mood. He leaned toward Haynes confidentially.

"If you ask me, August, that was the wildest play any man ever made to save his neck. You know—Reder getting his lawyer to have you ar-

rested, claiming you was really the one that done the killing. Believe me, it's a good thing you was able to prove you was miles away when Reder shot the cop. That little stunt of his might have made you trouble."

"How could it?" August Haynes took another swallow of whiskey. "The cop phoned the desk sergeant before he went into the jewelry store. He said he'd seen Reder trying to pull a slick one-man robbery and was going in after him. He wanted help in case Reder was hard to handle. Reder was found there with the gun in his hand and the cop dead at his feet. Nobody's prints were on the gun but Reder's. His pockets and briefcase were loaded with the jewels he was trying to steal. Don't be a nitwit, Alky."

Alky laughed. "Yeah, that was some boner, claimin' somebody'd knocked him out. Sure, he come to and found the gun in his hand and just forgot to drop it! Haw! Anybody could see he give himself that bump on the head, trying to figure some way out. Guess he knew cop-killing wasn't healthy."

Alky stopped short, started, whirled about. The clock above the bar had struck a resounding bong. His gaze lifted to the dial. The hands pointed to the hour of twelve. Alky drew a deep breath.

"Well, there he goes. That's the last of Les Reder. He was pretty dumb, after all. I could of thought up a better yarn than that myself, if I'd of wanted to rob the jewelry store and I was him."

Haynes emptied the whiskey glass. He set it down soundlessly as the gong sounded the last stroke of twelve.

"Anyone could have. Especially anyone who'd worked in the store for ten years. Get me another glass of whiskey."

"Sure." Alky reached for the glass. "Damn Reder, anyhow! Killin' a nice young cop like Mike Haynes. Whatever made him pull that cock-and-bull story about Mike being your son? Because he had the same name?"

Haynes' upward glance showed some irritation.

"Didn't you read all the papers, or

didn't you attend the whole trial? He wasn't too dumb after all. Somehow, he dug up the fact that I'd been married and had a son. He refused to believe both my wife and son were dead—dead as he is now. Dead as the whole issue is from now on. Get me that glass of whiskey. I'm going to drink it, and then I'm going home and get the first good night's sleep I've had in five months. Make it snappy."

ALKY muttered a hasty apology and hurried away with the empty glass.

Haynes ignored him. He stared at the wall above the table, but he didn't see it. Instead, he saw the face of Les Reder. It looked just as it had in the courtroom that last day, convulsed with anger and despair, the long thin face white with the passion of fury. He heard Les Reder's voice screaming at him across the courtroom.

"You can't escape me, August Haynes! It was you who killed Michael Haynes, not I! You can't escape me! The instant I'm hanged I'll come back and haunt you—haunt you to your death—"

Les Reder's dark eyes burned madly. Then the judge pounded his gavel, demanding order. Reder was finally dragged from the room, still mouthing that extravagant threat.

Well, it was all over now. He could go home, sleep for once, and thus forget it. He turned a pleasant smile toward Alky, approaching with the ninth glass of whiskey. The smile froze into a grin of agony. His eyes, dilated and unbelieving, leaped past Alky to the outer door of the cafe.

The door had just swung open. A man stood there, clothed only in shirt, trousers and shoes. On each wrist was an angry red band where imprisoned flesh had struggled against a hampering strap. A loosened strap dangled from one ankle. A long, black, bag-like cap hid his head.

Halted there, he raised one arm and pulled the cap from over his head. August Haynes saw the face. It was long, thin, dark, only it had now the marble pallor of the dead. The dark eyes bulged and stared. Around the throat burned the blood red of rup-

tured veins, where hard rope had bitten deep.

Those goggling, tortured eyes roved the cafe, came to rest on August Haynes. The ghastly figure moved, straight across the floor, directly toward him. Haynes wet his lips. He gulped. Madly, then, he reached for the glass of whiskey Alky had set before him.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" Alky said sharply.

"Look behind you," Haynes said, his voice hoarse.

Alky turned. Abruptly, he jerked rigid. His skin turned pasty. He backed away precipitately, both hands upflung as if to ward off a blow. Haynes could hear Alky's panting breath. In blind, helpless terror, the waiter stumbled back to the bar.

He who bore the rope's brand on his throat stopped at Haynes' table. Casually he pulled out a chair and sat down. The hideous black cap he draped over the edge of the table.

Haynes emptied the glass in one gulp of panic, and slammed the glass down. His voice was so choked, it rasped.

"I've got 'em! That last drink must have done it. I can't be seeing what I think I see."

A diabolical grin distorted the sal-low face across the table. The voice, when it came at last, was hollow. But Haynes could hear clearly every word.

"You didn't think I'd come, did you? You thought it was all nonsense. You know better now. You're a dirty cur, Haynes. You've always been a dirty cur. I only wonder how you ever hid it long enough to persuade a decent girl to marry you. How did you keep her duped for five years?"

Haynes sneered. He was cold with fear, chill sweat oozed from his every pore. But the brazen bravado that had always solved everything, did not desert him now.

"You think you know a lot about me, don't you?" he grated defiantly.

THERE was no expression on the marble face. The bulging, glazed eyes were frigid in death.

"I do. I'd been interested in criminology for years. That didn't come

out at the trial, but my lawyer knew it. In the course of my studies, I ran across your record. I know your wife left you when your son Michael was only four years old. She took the boy with her, because she had learned at last what a filthy crook you were. I know you went hog-wild, stole the boy from her, swore you would make a crook of him. That was to get even with her, wasn't it?"

Haynes tried to laugh. The laugh failed because he was shaking so badly. Why did he sit here and answer the thing? He knew perfectly well it didn't exist outside his mind. Why didn't he get up and go home? That would be the sane thing to do. He knew he was sane, because he could rationalize normally.

But he couldn't move. He couldn't keep his mouth shut. Some crazy superstitious awe drove him on.

"Unpleasant things happen to fellows who know too much, Reder." There—he had given the thing a name.

The pallid features still held no expression. One dead white hand, the strap mark glaring red about the wrist, waved Haynes to silence.

"Oh, that isn't all I know. I know you couldn't make a crook of that boy. He hated you, the life you tried to force on him, all your associates. He escaped you at the first opportunity. I don't know how, but he managed to stay clear of you. He only had one ambition—to be a cop and fight criminals. He made a good cop, too.

"When he caught you that night trying to loot the jewelry store, he recognized you as the thief. There was too much human feeling in him to allow him to shoot his own father. So he held his fire. There wasn't that kind of compunction in you. You shot him down fast enough, didn't you?"

Haynes shivered. With one shaking hand, he swept the cold sweat from his face. It couldn't be. He knew the thing was the figment of a whiskey nightmare.

But Alky stood not ten feet away, gripping a chair back so tightly that his knuckles were white. Staring straight across the table from Haynes,

he was almost as cadaver-sallow as the corpse was. Haynes laughed, a shaken defiant laugh that held a whimper of terror.

"Have you got the d.t.'s too?" he asked Alky.

The waiter made no sign that he had heard. He did not move. The curtain of a booth to his left billowed slightly in a passing breeze. Neither of the men noticed it.

WHEN the silence was broken by that hideous, dead voice, they jumped.

"You were smart, all right," the thing went on with deadly doggedness. "If you hadn't been, you wouldn't have eluded the law all these years. That night you were smart enough to move fast. It took brains to creep up behind me and knock me out. How many crooks would have thought of loading my briefcase and clothes with jewels? The master-touch was calling the police and pretending to be Michael.

"It isn't strange that you could fool the cops. Why shouldn't your voice sound like Michael's? He was your son. You were smart enough to know that any story I would tell would do me no good. But you didn't know that I got a glimpse of your face. When I saw it in the courtroom, I recognized it.

"You beat me with your trumped-up alibi, but you can't ever get away from me again. I've got you now. You killed your own son to save your dirty hide. You're going to live in hell from now on. Everywhere you go, I'll be there too. Everywhere you look, you'll see my face. You'll see the rope mark about my neck. You'll see the strap marks around my wrists—the straps that should have held your wrists. The rope that should have broken your neck."

"Get out," Haynes said frantically. "You aren't there. Tomorrow I'll be sober and I won't see you. You can't frighten me with idiotic bogey ideas. I'll be rid of you the minute I get over this drunk."

The thing across the table made a sound like a leering chuckle.

"That's what you think. Only you

don't, really. Your hellish cleverness has caught up with you. This is the second time you sent a man to the rope for a killing you'd done. Four years ago you pulled the same kind of slick deal. Ben Nelson died for a murder you committed. You're paying now for both. You know damned well you haven't got the d.t.'s. You know I'm here. You know I'll dog your footsteps till you're a sniveling, gibbering idiot."

Haynes didn't look much better than an idiot now. The bravado was oozing out of him fast. Terror was rapidly gaining control of him. He had tried fairy tales. What good had it done? This wasn't any nightmare. He didn't have the d.t.'s. The thing was there. It would be there wherever he went if he didn't placate it some way, get rid of it. Haynes leaned on the table. He spoke with a confidential air that he did not feel.

"Look, Reder, be reasonable. I don't know what's on your side of the world, over there. You certainly must have plenty to do without going around haunting me. Lay off me and let me alone. I haven't done anything to you."

CONTEMPT was the first sign of emotion on those dead features. The glazed eyes held a glint of mockery.

"No, you never did anything to me. Unless you count framing me for a killing you did, or sending me to the hangman's rope. I tell you, Haynes, I had only one thought when I marched down the corridor between the guards and up the thirteen steps to the trap. My arms were strapped to my sides, you know, and my ankles were strapped together. Till the trap sprang and the rope broke my neck, right to the last, I had only one thought. I was coming back to get even with you."

Haynes felt himself beginning to shake again.

"You can't follow me! I'll get away from you. I'll go places you won't go, places you can't go."

A hollow deriding laugh issued thinly from between the stiff cold lips of Les Reders.

"There isn't any place I can't go. There's only one place where I won't go, only one place where you'd be safe from me. That's in a prison cell. I've seen enough of them. Give yourself up. Go to prison. I'd be satisfied to let you alone then. You won't do that. The best you'd get is life, but they'd probably hang you. That's what they did to me. So I've got you. You can't get away from me as long as you live."

For an interminable moment, Haynes merely sat and stared. His mind, though, was racing. At that moment he was making a monumental decision.

He couldn't go on facing the thing, knowing it would dog his footsteps day and night. He would become a gibbering idiot in no time. Anything was better than that, even life in a cell! Cold sober now, he knew what he was doing.

"All the haunting you'll do, you can put in your eye," he said contemptuously.

He had forgotten where he was. He had forgotten Alky. He had not observed the curtain of the booth to Alky's left where the curtain had bilowed out. He knew only one thing. The dead had come back to haunt him. He was going to stop the haunting before it had well begun.

The cold marble face across the table showed a faint light of interest.

"Big words, Haynes. What do you think you can do?"

"Just what you never dreamed I would do—give myself up," Haynes replied sardonically. "But you missed a bet. You think I'm going to tell the cops how I killed that other guy and framed Ben Nelson for it. Think I'm going to tell how I killed my son and let you hang for it?"

"Sure he was my son! You had the whole thing figured right. That was just the way it happened. You worked there in the store. Running out when I shot Mike for his damned nosy interference, you made the whole thing easy for me. It didn't take any brains to knock you out and lay the plant on you."

"But if you think I'm going to tell that to anybody, you're nuts—if a dead man can be nuts. I can get my-

self into a prison cell and away from you without telling anything like that. I've got a regular category of crimes to choose from. Any of 'em will land me where you won't go. I'll choose one of the mild ones, you can be sure of that."

The thing across the table rose from the chair and picked up the black cap. Its glazed, dead eyes swept Haynes with infinite scorn in which there also lay a faint glimmer of pity.

"Well, you'll never frame another man as you did me, August Haynes. And I guess that's all I wanted."

Haynes heard an admiring chuckle behind him. He leaped to his feet, whirled about. His eyes started from his head.

From the booth to the left of Alky stepped two police in uniform, men with drawn guns and grim faces.

"A full and complete confession, Haynes," one said. "You're under arrest for the murder of your son. It's God's pity that Les Reder had to hang before the confession could be gotten out of you."

SO THEY took Haynes to the police station. The policemen told the desk sergeant, the sergeant told the chief, and the chief told the commissioner. When the commissioner heard the exciting news, he immediately called the governor.

"Let me congratulate you, sir," he applauded. "That was a splendid idea of yours."

"Which idea in particular are you referring to?" the governor asked modestly.

"Why, having Reder's twin brother dress up like a ghost to haunt that drunkard, Haynes, into a full confession."

"I wish I'd been able to grant a stay," the governor declared sadly. "You know, a man named Ben Nelson, hanged about four years ago, also claimed Haynes had framed him for a murder. I'm almost sure Haynes was guilty in both cases. It's really too bad."

The commissioner's brows met above the phone.

"Too bad about what, sir?"

"Too bad Reder's brother died of a heart attack here before I could send out the order to you. . . ." Suddenly there was a tense silence. "Say, how the devil did you know I was going to send out the order?" the governor demanded incredulously. "I didn't send it. It wouldn't have been any use after his brother—"

"B-but I *did* get it, sir!" the commissioner protested.

The commissioner's secretary, carefully listening to the conversation over a muted extension phone, could make absolutely no sense whatever out of it.

"What the hell?" he asked himself. "Are those guys nuts?"

Somewhere, out over the bay, a gallows geist walked with a smile on his face.

Coming: THE SAILOR QUILTS THE SEA, by Earle Dow

College Humor

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CENTS

THE BEST COMEDY IN AMERICA

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*Deep in Guiana Jungles,
the Monstrous Ego of an
Outraged Spirit Demands
Its Incredible Revenge*

Fear of the unknown drove the natives frantic

KANAIMA

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Border Incident," "Heads for Sale," etc.

I DIDN'T see how that last expedition of Jon Loring's and mine could have affected Jon more than it did me. There is no other explanation for what happened when we went back into the green hell we swore we'd never even think of again.

I—my name is Frank Hastings—went back with Jon simply because I would not allow him to go alone, and he could get no one else to go with him. On our last trip we'd spent five months on the headwaters of the

Cuyuni, among the Caribs, Arawaks and Akawai. We had escaped death by snake-bite a hundred times.

Jaguars had scratched for admittance at our tent flaps. Spiders of all kinds, including the black widow, had invaded our duffel and our bedclothing. If we hadn't been insane when we finally came out—*But maybe we were!*

I can only speak for myself, and I'm none too sure of that. Jon Loring, though, as soon as we were back in

New York, buried himself for four solid months in his crummy laboratory in Greenwich Village. At the end of that time he came to me.

"Frank, I want twenty-five thousand dollars. I'm going back!"

"You're crazy," I said. "I dropped twenty-five grand on the last trip. Almost lost my life, and I'll have recurrent fits of fever the rest of my days. Nope, nothing doing!"

"I'll pay back everything, but I'm going back up the Cuyuni, if I have to go alone and carry my new inventions on my back."

"New inventions?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. I've found a way to get out that gold and diamonds we found. It's as simple as A B C."

I studied his thin, hawklike face atop his wiry six feet of whipcord frame, and saw that he meant what he said. He was going back.

"Listen, Jon," I said, "take it easy. You can't really be thinking of going back. And how do you expect to handle that gold if you do?"

"The *Kanaima*!" said Jon Loring, while cold chills started moving slowly and icily along my spine.

I'd never forget the *Kanaima*, the evil spirit that ruled the lives of the Arawaks, Caribs and Akawai. When the fever was on us we'd even half-believed in it ourselves.

How does one describe the *Kanaima*? It was a monster without form and void. It was everywhere and nowhere. It spoke with the voices of anything and all things. Its task in life was to kill, fill with disease—and drive mad!

"Just how do you expect to get the *Kanaima* to work for you?" I demanded.

"The Indians believe in him," Jon said. "But they've never seen him. I'm going to create, right in the middle of the jungles of British Guiana, a *Kanaima* that'll make the Indians our abject slaves. They'll dig until they drop, if we'll protect them from this *Kanaima*. It's really as simple as all that!"

"No, Jon," I protested. "No! You can't play fast and loose with those Indians. Poisoned arrows. Tiger spiders in your shoes. *La baria* snakes

in your clothes. God knows where it might all end!"

"It will end with me being the richest white man ever to come out of British Guiana—or a dead one!" he swore.

WELL, that's how it all started. Just before dawn one morning two months later, I sat beside Jon Loring in the roomy pit of a monster amphibian, as the plane rested in its berth off Georgetown, capital and principal port of British Guiana.

All that strange stuff of his—laboratory equipment, what-not—Jon Loring had stored in the amphibian's baggage compartment. No mining tools worth mentioning. Just a lot of pieces of machinery I'd never heard of before, about which he was grimly, tenaciously mysterious. Queer tubular sections of metal, with tentacles. Reflectors like none I had ever seen before. Sound effects.

The motor was idling now. We were ready to leave. Loring looked to the front, settled himself in the pit, and pushed the big ship along the bay for the take-off. After a long run we rose ponderously, because we were so heavily laden.

Jon followed the Essequibo River to Bartica, thence to the mouth of the Cuyuni. He then followed the general course of the muddy, thunderous Cuyuni. I looked down, remembering that we had gone up this river by boat but months before. That twenty of our native crew had died in one ghastly fashion or another—arrows from the jungles, snake-bite, spider-bite, fever and dysentery.

One had died for no reason we could find—but the native carriers said the *Kanaima* had got him.

Four hours later and we hit Lake Acheko—our name for it, since no map showed it, except a rough one we ourselves had made—squarely on the nose. I knew, and Jon Loring knew, that the roaring of our motor had sounded all through the jungle. Arawaks, Caribs, Mantusa, Akawai, all the Indian tribes knew by now that a giant bird was winging its way into their strange, primitive wilderness. I was sweating myself, for the further

we went toward Lake Acheko, the more I was sure that Jon Loring was flying us to disaster.

I wasn't afraid for myself especially, I swear it. I simply knew that Jon Loring was playing with the souls of a primitive people, in his lust for riches—and that it was dangerous beyond words to trifle with the *Kanaima*.

We circled down for a landing finally. Jon had a loud-speaker arrangement on the plane, from which he could have spoken to any Indians who might be in the jungle below, bidding them have no fear. But such a voice out of the sky would have frightened the natives out of their skins. Besides, no necessity had yet arisen for speaking to them.

The amphibian landed smoothly enough. Jon Loring studied the shores of this snake-infested swamp-lake with a professional eye. Then he taxied up to the bank between two great *morre* trees that had fallen into the water. There was just room enough between them. Jon Loring grinned when he saw I remembered those two trees.

"Yes," he said, "this plane is built to specifications all right. I knew what I'd use those two trees for a year ago, when we stood here on the bank and noticed them! Let's get going. We'll have to handle our own duffel, and do our best work before fever gets us down. For I won't be able to spare the Indians for anything—except the gold!"

IT WAS heartbreaking work, getting the dunnage ashore, securing the amphibian to her moorings so that a sudden hurricane wouldn't fling her into the tree-tops a hundred yards away. We wielded our machetes with might and main, clearing the hilltop where we would erect a log cabin. We set out carbide lamps by which to see. We wanted the cabin ready and strong as a fortress by the time the Indians got up nerve enough to come and investigate.

"And a cupola on top of it," said Loring, "for my equipment. I'll have a creator's job to do, you know! For the first time in generations beyond

counting, there'll be a real *Kanaima* on the Cuyuni!"

"Don't do it!" I said. "Such things are better left to themselves!"

He chuckled. There was something rasping, something horrible, in his chuckle. . . .

We worked that night like Trojans in the light of our carbide lamps, so bright no Indian could look into them. We cut logs and put them in place. We did the work of ten men, Jon because he was driven by a devil of greed, I because I was frankly apprehensive and wanted to make an end of our expedition as soon as possible, work up to some climax, no matter what it might be.

Atop our log cabin—whose chinks we packed tightly with a mixture of mud and sticky juice from a gum tree which grew thickly here—we built the cupola Jon wanted, set up apparatus stranger than any I had ever seen. When I asked Jon about it, he pretended not to hear. He would tell me when he was ready, and not before.

By the time we were ready to set up housekeeping, we had killed twenty *la baria* snakes, five bushmasters, a score of tiger spiders, a dozen black widows—three inches across—without leaving the vicinity of our cabin. That should give some idea as to why the sill of our door was so high.

Then on the second afternoon we walked, cutting our way as we had once before, along the same trail that the jungle had reclaimed since our first expedition, to the site where we had found gold on that last trip.

Again we panned the stream when we'd beaten our way back to it. We pulled up some grass, and Jon Loring went into an ecstasy of excitement. The gold was still there, all right—but to handle it in the ordinary way would have cost countless lives.

If Jon hadn't depended so much on the *Kanaima*, I'd have been excited about our prospects myself. Though money didn't interest me overmuch, because I'd inherited my father's rather large estate and left it prudently invested.

Not one Indian had come near us as yet. I mentioned this to Jon when

he'd got over his first excitement at rediscovering the source of gold.

"They'll come," he said, calmly for him. "We're their only salvation."

Somehow, the way he said that made my flesh shiver.

"I'll show you something now,"

Jon said when we got back to the cabin. "Up we go to the laboratory!"

We went up the ladder to the rough cupola, which had the only windows in the shack. It was a comfortable enough place, considering the location, but those mechanical contrivances of Jon's got me down.

"I've adapted ventriloquism on a large scale," he said. "Can you indicate, roughly, the location of that village on Warwah Creek where we camped?"

"Yes," I said, pointing. "A day's journey through the jungle."

"That means, then," said Jon Loring, "that the Arawaks of that village will be here by this time tomorrow night, to begin their job of bringing that gold into our cabin! Or better still, storing it in the amphibian. Listen!"

H E SWUNG one of the things I had called a reflector—a sound projector—so that it seemed to peer out into the dark in the general direction of Warwah Creek. He pressed a button. A pocket-sized dynamo began to hum.

Almost instantly, though no other sound save that of the dynamo could be heard, a ghastly, terrifying shriek rose from the jungle a mile or so to the south. It was the scream of the jaguar, the howl of the red baboon, the screeching of parrots, the call of the trumpet bird—*yet it was actually none of these!*

I gasped, and cold chills ran along my spine again.

The sound continued for a second or two. Jon Loring was fiddling with dials and buttons, and a compass. And when he stepped back from his "reflector" the mingled shrieking of jaguar, howler and parrots was broadcast through the jungle with the swiftness of sound itself.

It sped away like a hurricane—and some of the hurricane's terror was in

it. It did not deviate from its course in one iota.

I got the picture then. I jumped to my feet, grabbed Jon Loring by the shoulder.

"So *that's* it!" I shouted. "That's your *Kanaima*! Jon, you can't do it. It's utterly mad! It will bring nothing but catastrophe. What right have you to play god?"

He fairly snarled at me. His eyes were flashing fire, his teeth gleaming in a smile of satanic triumph. Without warning then he smashed me on the jaw with a terrific right. I shook the cabin as I fell, but did not go out.

Jon Loring stood over me. "All my life," he grated, "I've wanted money—gobs, scads and piles of it! Now's my chance. Nobody, not even you, can stand in my way. No, nor God nor the devil—nor all the power of the Arawak *Kanaima*!"

I lay there on the floor, trying to collect my senses. Presently I became aware of a strange circumstance. Jon had had a small phonograph, or what looked like one, playing behind the reflector of his. Now he had stopped it and was speaking softly—in the Arawak tongue, which both of us knew.

"Go to the place of gold and the house of the *panakiri*, if you would live another hour!"

A *panakiri* was a white man. And all through the jungle the Indians would be hearing that command—a command which they would believe came from the black soul of invisible, all-encompassing *Kanaima*. They would come.

But what if they discovered the trick?

Sick and ill from Jon's punch on the jaw, from the whole situation which might so easily get out of hand, I got to my feet and slumped in a chair, while Jon Loring set his stage. He shifted the reflector, adjusted it to different distances, different compass readings—and I knew that all through the jungle, for a hundred miles up and down the Cuyuni, he was projecting *Kanaima* to fill the Caribs, Arawaks and Akawai with abysmal terror.

I watched him direct that beam of sound at various points in the jungle,

to contact enough villages to furnish him the men, women and children he would need. Yes, the women and children would do most of the work, as they usually did among the Indians. But the men would have to work too, this time. . . .

THE next day was hellish, as we waited. The jungle was fairly alive with sound and movement. Jon and I sat, scarcely thinking of food, in the cupola to wait. Night of the second day after the birth of the "*Kanaima*" descended upon us. Shortly thereafter we saw the first glow of fire through the jungle.

There were scores of spots of light, which could mean but one thing. The Indians were closing in on us. They never let their fires go out, carried little live coals with them wherever they went. It was these glowing coals we saw through the night.

I tried to count them, but there were so many I could not. I became dizzy with the effort—or was it a recurrence of the fever? Jon's face was a harsh mask of triumph.

"They've come so fast," he said, "they didn't even stop for their bows and poisoned arrows!"

"And the jungle is filled with snakes," I frowned. "I'll bet dozens have been bitten, died on the trails."

"Snakes," Jon retorted, "don't bite Indians. You should know that!"

There was some such story, but of course I didn't believe it. Though I know the Indians walked barefooted everywhere, even through the thickest, most reptile-infested grass. The spots of light, like single eyes, came slowly and more slowly toward us. And there was something else.

All around and behind those approaching Indians sounded the hideous voice of Jon Loring's "*Kanaima*," lashing them forward with its terror. Those stabs of fire were in full flight toward us. More than the *Kanaima* the natives feared just one thing—loss of their fires, for fire was life.

The voice of "*Kanaima*" died down, and there was a dramatic touch when Jon Loring pressed a button and lights came on all about our cabin. They outlined the shack itself, but

left the cupola in darkness, so that the Indians could not see us, but only hear the voice of Jon Loring, addressing them in their native Arawak.

I looked down at those huddled, packed, frightened Indians. They were terrified beyond words. They were fearful of these lights which blinded them. But they were more fearful of the horrible, formless voice which Jon Loring projected behind their backs.

"You come to me," intoned Jon Loring, his voice ringing out to show his triumph, "because only I can stand between the *Kanaima* and you. You know me from moons and moons ago. I am one of the two *panakiri* who were your friends. We are still your friends, your protectors against the *Kanaima*—"

"Leave me out of it, Jon," I heard myself rasping, never guessing what my own words would mean to me. "I'll have none of this, none of it!"

"I alone," resumed Jon Loring, contemptuously ignoring me, "can protect you from the *Kanaima*. I have been away from you for a little while. Now I have returned, riding on the back of a great bird, because all these many moons I have thought of you, wanted to make your lives safer.

"I am here, and I am stronger than *Kanaima*. But *Kanaima* is strong, too, and cannot be entirely destroyed. He requires payment from you if he is to spare you. I shall tell you what that payment is."

For a long moment there was silence, while the bright glow cast a ruddy glare over the red, almost naked bodies of Indian men, women and children. Those bodies were bathed in sweat, in the slime of the jungle through which they had fought their frantic way to reach us—and what they had been told was safety.

"Little by little, as you pay the *Kanaima* not to molest you," intoned Jon Loring, "his strength will decrease. In the end, when you have paid in full, he will die, or go away and never bother you again. This I promise you, because all my power, far greater than his, shall be concentrated to that end."

One of the Arawak men, a high chieftain by the look of him—an Indian I'd never seen before—spoke up in a voice of such terror that it was almost impossible to understand him.

"What shall we do to save ourselves, O *panakiri*?"

"At your hands are the bright lights which turn night into day," said Loring. "Let some of your hands grasp those lights, lift them, and bear them to the place of gold you all know. There all of you will begin the task of gathering the yellow metal. When it has all been taken from the stream and the surface beds and stored in this house which you can all see, the *Kanaima* will leave you."

"But while you labor he will be near, all about you, to guard his interest in your payment. If he is satisfied, he will grow gradually weaker, until the end—"

"Jon! Jon!" I protested. "You're mad! Mad! It isn't true! You're exploiting them more than the Conquistadores ever dreamt of doing!"

"I am after gold," Loring snarled. "It means nothing to them, and the work will not hurt them any. Keep out of this!"

"But to lie to them, to cheat them—"

"Do you want another punch on the jaw?" The question was well timed, well put. Physically I had no chance against Jon Loring.

The Indians hesitated. Jon Loring pressed a button. As he did so the jungle, in the darkness behind, was filled with the ghastly shriek of the "*Kanaima*." I knew the secret, but even so it made my blood run cold. What must the real *Kanaima* think of all this?

The Indians jumped to the lanterns, caught them up. They dashed into the jungle to the west, into the thick of the area where we had picked gold from the roots of the grass, panned it from the trickling stream. We didn't even tell the Indians how to get it. They knew ways of their own.

If they didn't, they thought their very lives depended on finding ways. We could see the glow of their fires, the brilliance of our own lights, through the trees.

I saw a python swinging from a limb, waiting for prey. I saw a dozen Indians pass within reach of him, without seeing him—and he did not offer to whip his coils about a single sweating body. Maybe he, too, feared the *Kanaima*. For the "*Kanaima*" was there—Jon Loring saw to that.

Jon's projected "*Kanaima*" formed a cordon all around the area of gold. It paralleled the trail the Indians made between the field and our shack. And Jon Loring laid it on thick, for now he put another of his "inventions" into use.

He surrounded that area with a wall of black, through which darted streaks of cold flame. The area surrounded by this strange cordon was shaped like a bulbous bottle, whose neck ended at the door of our cabin.

"What is it?" I asked him hoarsely.

He chuckled half madly. "I call it my black boomerang! It, too, was made to specifications, because I knew the exact extent of the whole area—where our shack would sit, how high it would be. Another reflector idea, you'll notice.

"I simply reflect black light against the jungle. The lights carried by the Indians are proof against it; but beyond the area of their lights, it is visible. If they knew it was all around them, they'd die of fright!"

"Black light?" I repeated.

"Oh, never mind the details. I simply surround them with a wall of black. A carbon ray it is, really, spraying out from the reflector. With a touch on a button I charge the infinitesimal particles of carbon with electricity. Then, to add to the illusion, I speak with a horrible voice—the voice of '*Kanaima*,' Hastings!—and there you have it!"

IT SOUNDED simple enough but it wasn't simple at all. To the Indians, *Kanaima* was more cataclysmic than the end of the world, than if the Cuyuni River had risen and covered their villages with twenty feet of raging, muddy water. They were at work, those natives. And as they worked, they chanted.

Their chant was the chant for the dead, and it made gooseflesh all over

my body. I stared at their lights until they almost blinded me. Now and again I saw snakes crawl into view to the right, vanish on the left. Even the reptiles, it seemed, were fleeing from Jon Loring's "*Kanaima*."

Presently he cut the voice of "*Kanaima*" to an impatient muttering. The Indians must have thought, as Jon had bidden them think, that with the first gold uncovered and gathered together, the satanic power of *Kanaima* had been that much lessened.

The natives took heart. They worked with a will. I could see their glistening bodies through binoculars, felt as the old Conquistadores must have felt—had they had any mercy or any hearts at all—when they saw their Indian slaves laboring just like this to furnish them riches for the imperial monarchy of Spain.

I felt like a slave-driver, yet there was nothing I could do. Nothing could have deterred Jon Loring—not after the first *manapee*—wicker basket—of gold nuggets was brought to our cabin door.

Jon went down ahead of me, after the Indians who had brought that *manapee* had trotted back to their labors, slinking fearfully between those black walls of the bottleneck Jon Loring had created. When I got to the ground floor I realized exactly what that yellow metal had done to my old friend.

He had spilled it out on the floor, and was washing his hands with it. I stared at him, numb horror gripping my very soul. He was conscious of nothing but this gold. He didn't even see me. In the light from our shack lamp his face itself took on the color of gold.

I was more frightened than I had ever thought possible. I spoke to him, but he did not hear me. Finally he put the gold back into the *manapee*—the nuggets were so big, they did not fall through the interstices in the mesh—and carried it out. I knew that he would store it in the amphibian. He was terribly eager to grab as much of the stuff as he could and get away.

Even then I think Jon Loring

feared some catastrophe, that he was racing that catastrophe against time. But I'm sure he didn't analyze his fear, didn't know he was afraid, nor of what.

After that the *manapees* came thick and fast. Obviously we had come across the richest deposit of gold along the Cuyuni. We'd be lucky if we could carry it all back with us. But Jon Loring, I knew, would jettison all our equipment when we returned, take a chance on a jungle crash that would leave us without provisions, supplies, rifles, anything.

I had to take that chance with him. I'd be lucky if he didn't forget me, leave me behind. I saw now, for the first time, what greed could really do to a strong man who had never had riches, or even sometimes enough to eat and wear.

THE gold poured into the shack. The *manapees* were piled high. We carried them to the plane, and the Indians took away the empties. When, as time passed, a native lost some of his fear of the black wall, of the voice of "*Kanaima*" that came out of that wall, Jon Loring would set the voice to shrieking its threats, mingled with snatches of Arawak or Carib, and the work would be redoubled.

Jon had decided, plainly enough, to give the Indians no time for food or sleep until he had got his gold. He intended working the creatures until they dropped. I argued with him, but to no avail.

"Who are they?" he sneered. "What do they amount to? If they all die, what does it matter to the rest of the world?"

"Would it matter anything to you, Jon, to your immortal soul?"

"Not a damned thing," he snapped. "I have no immortal soul. I have but one life to live. Now, thanks to my '*Kanaima*,' I shall live it to the full!"

It made me shiver to hear him. But, in a way, he kept his promise to the Indians. As they ravished the ground of its golden stream; as they ripped and tore with sharp sticks, as they clawed with fingers and toes, as they all but dug with their teeth, the gold deposit showed fresh richness. And

ever the voice of "*Kanaima*" lashed them to fresh effort.

"Our 'take' is now enough to pay off every cent I owe you," said Jon Loring on the second day. "From now on every nugget belongs to Jon Loring!"

"Jon," I said, "let's get out of here! I forgave you the debt long ago. Take what we have, and let's go, before some of the Indians die from exhaustion. If that should happen, your soul will some day torment you."

"I haven't forgiven myself my debt to you," said Jon coldly. "And I have to live with myself!"

He put his gaunt face close to mine, so I could look into those eyes of his that were now deep-sunken, rapacious with gold-lust.

"I don't have to live with the Indians, ever, after this—even with their ghosts! Even with their damned *Kanaima*!"

I staggered back from him. For again he had uttered the word which named the one real terror of the Indians, as though he challenged it contemptuously to battle.

Day followed day. Now and again Indians fell in their tracks. But they always rose, after a drink of water and a few mouthfuls of cassava bread, and went on with their titanic labors. They were buying their lives from the *Kanaima* with all the strength of their sweating bodies, inspired by all the primitive terror of their numb souls.

The gold was now weighing down our amphibian moored between those two trees. If the Indians knew what was happening to the gold they brought, they gave no sign. They didn't care. For save at frequent intervals when Jon Loring felt they needed prodding, the "*Kanaima*" bothered them little. "*Kanaima*" merely showed himself in the black smoke at night, and spoke out of it with a terrifying voice. During the day he merely spoke.

And Jon Loring was a man beside himself with ecstasy. He told me wild dreams he had, of buying islands and building palaces, of stocking them with wines, filling the rich rooms with women, of living like a

king. Or he would buy yachts, or skyscrapers, or the fastest automobiles that could be built. He would buy airplanes that could challenge the heights of the stratosphere!

HE FONDLED those golden nuggets, crooning to them as though they were children. And most of the time he did not know I was there. He ate mechanically of the food I prepared for him, without knowing that I gave it to him, or that he ate. His eyes were fixed on the gold, or on the figments of his mad dreams.

And then one day the Indians gathered under the cupola, just as the sun was going down and the jungle was being swallowed by darkness. The last trickle of gold had come to us, been taken to the amphibian, which none of the Indians had ever bothered themselves about, because they had been able to see nothing but their terror, and anything else was unimportant.

"Well," said Jon Loring, "have you got all the gold? Are you positive? If you have not, I am not sure the *Kanaima* will be satisfied."

The Indians shifted uneasily. I'll never forget their brown gaunt faces, looking up at us, toward the voice that came down to them out of the upper dark—the voice of a man who had come back as a god to free them forever from the *Kanaima*.

"We have finished," said one of the chiefs with dignity. "What we have done has not been too much to save us from the *Kanaima*. Now, if the white god-brother will free us from the eyes of *Kanaima*, so that we may return to our homes in safety—"

Jon Loring chuckled, spoke in an aside to me.

"I really ought to leave my '*Kanaima*' here, to keep them in line. But I guess I'll keep my promise!"

He stared at the apparatus in the cupola. A grim, waiting silence hung over the forest. Outside on the lake I could hear water lapping against the sides of the heavily laden amphibian. I looked down at those tense, upturned native faces. Jon Loring stood poised above his apparatus, a hammer in his hand.

"It has served its purpose," he said to me. "I'll never need it again. No one else shall ever have it!" He turned and spoke to the Indians in the Arawak tongue.

"I promised you I would destroy the *Kanaima*," he said. "Now—I keep that promise!"

With the sudden fury of a madman Jon Loring went to work with the hammer on the reflectors that had held those Indians in bondage for days and nights, those reflectors whose false sounds and beams of light had loaded the amphibian down with vast wealth. In a few seconds Jon had made a mass of wreckage of the whole thing.

"Now," he snapped at me, "let's get out of here— *My God in heaven*, what is that?"

My heart constricted, and I was suddenly numb with terror. For a ghastly shriek had come out of that forest jungle. It charged toward us, gathering strength and volume, came on as with the speed of a hurricane. Jon Loring stared at me, reading my thoughts in my face, as I read his fright in his incredulous eyes.

He had "slain" the false "*Kanaima*," and now, roaring out of the jungle to punish him for his sacrilege—

But how explain a thing that could not possibly be true? Yet it was, for both of us heard it coming! Jon Loring did a gallant thing, at the last. He called out to the Indians.

"Flee for your lives!"

Then that horrible sound, breathing the mad fury of a hurricane, smothered our cabin. It ripped and tore at the roof. Jon and I retreated to the ground floor, and as we did so the cupola was torn away, carried into the jungle. We heard the Indians scream as they fled.

A black fog seemed to be creeping now into the shack from all directions!

It swirled and eddied in the cabin, dimming the flames of our lamps. It showed me two gold nuggets, like yellow eyes, glowing in a corner where Jon Loring had somehow missed them. And it showed me *something* against which Jon Loring was fighting with all his great strength.

THE black fog shrouded his writhing body. *It did not touch me!* Jon tugged frantically at invisible hands about his throat. His eyes bulged horribly. His tongue protruded. Then he was down on his knees. I jumped to help him, and *something* hurled me back against the wall with terrific force. I sprawled out, stunned, and watched the horrible thing destroy Jon Loring.

And all the time, as the formless, black, hideous *something* battered and tore at Jon Loring, the jungle forest all around was filled with the shrieking of jaguars, the howls of red baboons, the scolding of parrots—with all the various and mingled voices the Indians associated with the all-powerful *Kanaima*!

Finally the sound died away, the black fog vanished, and I looked down at Jon Loring, who was dying in convulsions! From his every pore—I could tell, because most of his clothing had been torn to shreds, ripped off him—oozed dark-red blood.

So a man looked, so he oozed blood and the sweat of agony when he lay dying of the bite of the bushmaster. But there was no bushmaster in the shack—and none could have crawled into it!

"We'll say the bushmaster did it," said Jon Loring, gasping in anguish for breath, "because nobody would believe the truth, Frank. I lost at my own game. The *Kanaima* beat me, Frank! The *real Kanaima*! But there's one thing—I said I'd repay you ten for one, and I've done it!"

He twisted into a loathsome ball of ravished flesh, and died.

Outside, the forest was filled with a waiting silence. I went to the door, stunned by the catastrophe. Through the woods I saw moving dots of fire. The Indians were going home. Did they know the end of the story? Did they know that their own *Kanaima* still dwelt in the jungle? That only for a few days had he been bested by an impostor?

Or did a bushmaster really get Jon Loring? No bushmaster did, of that I am sure! And as for the *Kanaima*—But I don't believe it! And yet—

Yet, modern man though I am, I

cannot say I do not believe in the *Kanaima*—not when I saw how Jon Loring died! Not when I saw what no animal could have done to his body. . . .

I flew the amphibian out, after burning our shack and the horrible bundle that had been Jon Loring. The gold? I gave the British government its share. I gave the rest to my own country—and then washed my hands

of it, literally. It recalled too much horror, and something of the *Kanaima* might have come out of deep Guiana with it, for all I knew of his power.

I took no chances. One does not trifle with such things. One only tries to forget, knowing full well that in after years he will still start awake in bed, bathed with cold sweat and the shriek of Hell still ringing in his ears.



*The Mystic Snake Gave Youth to Cruel Emperor Tiberius
—but Wild Debauches Deafened Him to the
Grim Portent of His Enemies' Hisses in*

POWER OF THE DRUID

By ROBERT BLOCH

COMING NEXT ISSUE



THE SLANTING SHADOW

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Author of "Man In The Dark," "Eyes Of The Serpent," etc.

Abner Follansbee, Psychic Investigator, Finds a New Brand of Magic in a Haunted Inn!

MR. ABNER FOLLANSBEE, investigator for the Society for Psychic Research, stopped the car and peered out into the Wisconsin woods.

"This is apparently the place, Fred," he said to his companion.

"Yes, it is," Fred Tenney, who had looked fleetingly about him, added, "There's a sign off to one side. Pretty well shot. 'Kroll's Inn'."

"Now let's see that young lady's letter again, Fred," said the older man.

Tenney took a letter from his inner coat pocket and thrust it toward Follansbee, who opened it and regarded the scrawled writing dubiously.

"Hm," he murmured presently. "Probably just another wild goose chase. Looks to me more like a mat-



There, in the moonlight, was a tiny moving shadow

ter for the police than for the society. The girl's guardian, old Uriah

Kroll, disappeared over a year ago. Since then his rooms been *funny*. That's all it amounts to. I suppose the young lady thinks she's got a ghost on her hands."

"Isn't there something about a shadow?" The younger man smiled.

"Oh, yes, 'There's a queer shadow on the bed in his room when the moon shines', she writes. 'I can't understand it. It shouldn't be there'. That's all."

"Very lucid," commented Fred laconically.

Follansbee sniffed.

"Whenever there's anything to upset a young woman, nothing will do until she's written the society. I think they're all born ghost hunters."

"Old curmudgeon," murmured Fred. "Anyway, we aren't getting anywhere here in the car."

The older man looked dubiously about.

"Will the machine be safe on the road?"

"Nothing would find its way into these God-forsaken woods in a week of Sundays." The younger man leaped from the car and stood looking around him. "An inn here," he said over his shoulder. "What an optimist old Kroll must have been!"

The inn itself was a quiet little house of stone. It hugged the ground in the middle of a clearing not very far from the heavily wooded roadside. A flagstone walk led up to a low stone porch, and the key to the front door lay under the mat, just where Miss Harriet Sears had said it would be in her letter to Follansbee.

"At least we can thank what kind spirits there are that we're alone," Follansbee said, as he bent to unlock the door. "Miss Sears isn't likely to come bursting in on us at all hours of the night. She vowed she'd never set foot inside the building again until we'd settled that shadow business."

He threw the door open on a short hallway leading directly into a low, raftered sitting room. The room was comfortably and well furnished, with comparatively antique pieces. The chairs were curiously carved and obviously handmade. Follansbee, however, wasted no time in the sitting

room. He led the way into another, smaller room, and around into a large bedroom in the southeast corner of the building.

This was the room which had been occupied by Uriah Kroll, prior to his disappearance. Off in the walls they heard a scurry of rats, alarmed by the human footfalls. It was a large, oddly furnished room, with a bed against the south wall, and a single chair next to it. The north wall of the room next the door was occupied by what appeared to be a work-bench. Follansbee glanced at the bed, went over to the work-bench and bent above it. He moved it, and leaped backwards with a gasp. From underneath, a large gray rat went hissing into a shadowy hole. Follansbee turned back to the work-bench.

"Seems to have been kept pretty much as it was when the old man was alive."

TENNEY came over and stood at his side.

"What do you make of it?" Follansbee asked.

"Queer outfit," Tenney murmured. "Looks as if he might have been blowing glass, doesn't it?"

Follansbee bent and took up a book.

"Well, look at this," he said in surprise, "Arbatel's 'Treatise on Magic'."

"Yes," supplemented Tenney excitedly, "and see here! He's got a trident, and incense, and oils. Why, Kroll dabbled in magic."

"No doubt of it," assented Follansbee.

He put the book down and examined the instruments on the bench. He chuckled oddly to himself, held up a magical diagram made on a sheet of stiff paper, and smiled at it with Tenney. Then he turned away, looked once more about the room.

"Did you bring the lunch kit?" he asked.

Tenney nodded.

"Good. We'll eat, then. The sun'll go down in about three-quarters of an hour, and the moon'll be up shortly after. We might as well be ready."

"What's the procedure?" asked Tenney.

"We sleep here. Nice, comfortable

double bed, as far as I can see," replied Follansbee.

"Very well."

Lunch eaten, the two investigators returned to the bedroom where they were to sleep. The moon had already risen, so long had they sat in the kitchen, but it was not yet throwing its light through the single window to the south. Follansbee and Tenney sat talking for the better part of an hour.

It was Follansbee who first noticed that the moonlight had reached the counterpane of the bed.

"There we are," he said. "Now for the shadow."

They sat for a few minutes in silence, while the light of the moon crept in a parallelogram across the counterpane. But there was no shadow save the shadow of a tree, a few branches of which dipped into the moonlight.

Presently Follansbee rose with obvious irritation, went over to the bed and stood looking down at the patch of moonlight.

"Batty as can be," he murmured, obviously intending his remark for the ears of Miss Harriet Sears.

TENNEY, who drifted to his side, said suddenly:

"What a funny angle those branches have!"

Follansbee bent abruptly closer.

"Just as if they were coming from above," he murmured. "But, look here. They're not just branches, they're like a forest of little trees, and what odd spines for leaves."

Suddenly he whirled to the window.

"Oh," he said harshly, "now I see. There's no tree beyond the window!"

"Nor anything to make that shadow," added Tenney, looking past the older man.

They stood for a few moments scrutinizing the glass and looking through it into the clearing outside. The line of trees to the south was too far for any shadow to reach the house. The trees were shadowed in an uneven line across the clearing below. Then they returned to the bed and stood looking down at the counterpane.

"Well, there's some explanation,"

murmured Tenney. "There has to be." Follansbee nodded.

"But I don't understand," he began. Then he stopped abruptly, staring down at the parallelogram of moonlight with widening eyes.

Tenney followed the older man's startled gaze.

There, in the moonlight, was a tiny, moving shadow. Only slightly over two inches in height, moving with incredible rapidity of limb, it achieved no distance in the parallelogram of moonlight. It was the diminutive figure of a man!

Back and forth it ran within a space so small that it might have been covered by the extended palm of a hand. The two men stared in growing amazement. Then Follansbee turned to the window again.

There was nothing there—nothing on the glass, nothing against the glass outside, nothing flying against the moonlight high in the sky.

He turned back to the bed. The shadow was still there. He bent, peering intently. The incredible shadow was running wildly, this way and that, its tiny arms outflung, its spindle legs moving rapidly upon the counterpane, a thing alive, yet without substance to seize upon.

"Good God!" muttered Tenney at last. "It's a man—a live man. But where in God's name is he?"

"I don't know," Follansbee jerked out.

He stood for a few moments more, his fascination for the unbelievable shadow holding him there. Then he swung away and went over to the workbench, where he lit a lamp and began to thumb swiftly through a quartet of old books lying carelessly abandoned on the bench.

"Can I help?" Tenney asked.

Follansbee nodded.

"Check up on all references to magical designs in these books," he said. "I've got an idea. I don't know what's in it, but it's worth trying."

Following the example of the older man, Tenney bent over one of the ancient volumes on the bench.

It was Follansbee who found what they sought.

"Here it is," he said suddenly.

"Magical designs on glass. It's been marked up by someone, too. Kroll, most likely. Parts of it are illegible, but the sense of it can be made out. The third paragraph down in the second column."

Tenney bent to read the printed lines on the yellow page:

"Certain images have brought into being worlds of glass, invisible in glass. The objects are of such consistency that though they cannot be seen in the light of the sun, they are shadowed by the moon. . . . The glass is of no ordinary kind, but must be especially made. And the creatures to be placed there may be drawn from the mind or from life."

"You see?" cut in Follansbee, drawing the book away. "That's what Kroll was doing—but something happened. He tried it on himself, and vanished."

Tenney turned astonished eyes on the glass in the window. He shuddered as it slowly dawned on him that the figure he saw there was Kroll.

Follansbee abruptly left the workbench and, going over to the window, raised it.

"It's the upper pane we want," he murmured. "It must be broken. There's no other way. But be careful that all the pieces fall into the room."

AS HE spoke, Follansbee pulled down the upper half of the window. Then he drew the curtain down outside the glass, and into the room again below.

"All right," he said. "Break it, Fred."

Tenny rapped sharply against the glass of the upper pane. It did not

break. He struck it harder with the trident from the work-bench. Still it did not break. Then he smashed into it with all his strength. The glass broke into incredibly small fragments that slithered down the drawn curtain to the floor.

Follansbee left the curtain snap up. Looking down, he and Tenney exclaimed simultaneously. The window lay in silver fragments on the carpet in the moonlight that stretched to the bed—but beyond the fragments ran a tiny dark shadow, of substance.

"Good God!" breathed Follansbee hoarsely. "The dimensions didn't change!"

"It's Kroll," said Tenney. He swooped to seize hold of the figure on the carpet, but at that moment it disappeared under the bed.

"Kroll!" shouted Follansbee suddenly. "Uriah Kroll, come out!"

There was a vague scuttering noise beneath the bed.

Follansbee sank to his knees and peered into the moonlight dusk.

"Kroll," he whispered softly. Turning abruptly, he said to his companion, "Get over on the other side. He's skirting the wall toward the door."

Tenney moved to obey.

Then suddenly there came a quick rustle, a dark shadow launched itself from the wall upon the two-inch figure that crept toward the door, there was a shrill squeal, a tiny human scream, an abrupt, unnatural silence.

"A rat," whispered Follansbee shakily. "Oh, my God!"

He got up shakily and looked down at the bed.

The moonlight lay unbroken on the counterpane.

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AT ALL STANDS

The Cauldron

By LLOYD ARTHUR ESHBACH

Author of "Three Wise Men," "The Time Conqueror," etc.



Before MacNair's eyes rose the towers of a castle

THERE was no light in the little Highland cottage save the flickering gleam of the peat fire. Its glow dimly outlined the two men seated before the wide stone hearth—tall, broad-shouldered Robert MacNair, and his short, weather-beaten old uncle, Jock Dougal. Swirling tendrils of aromatic smoke rose from their blackened briars to mingle with the pungent odor of burning peat.

Faint sounds filtered into the room from the wilderness outside—the

*In Bonnie Days Long Ago,
a Scottish King Did Lose
the Gift of Life Itself*

plaintive whisper of the wind creeping through the oaks and pines on the slopes of Ben Hec, the endless lament of a leaping mountain burn, and the eerie cry of a night bird alone in the solitude and dark that mantled Loch More.

"Robbie, lad," Jock Dougal finally said, "I'm unco' glad to ha'e ye here wi' me in my wee Heiland hame, but I ken fu' weel that ye ha'e no' come juist to see auld Jock. If it's no' askin' ought that ye canna tell, Robbie, wha' brings ye here?"

MacNair looked quizzically at the old Scot. A little man, Jock Dougal, with a ruddy, wizened face, thick white hair and chin whiskers, and his head cocked far to one side as he shrewdly surveyed his nephew. He looked, thought MacNair, like a little brown gnome of the moorlands.

"I've been expecting that question, Uncle Jock," he answered. "And I suppose you'll tell me I've come on a fool's errand. But in a word, I'm seeking the Cauldron—the Cauldron of Tegid the Bald. Have you ever heard of it, Uncle Jock?"

Deliberately Dougal took his ancient pipe from his mouth and tamped the tobacco deeper into the bowl. He looked at MacNair with narrowed eyes.

"Ay, Robbie, I'm thinkin' I heard o' Tegid's Cauldron once—'twas lang syne when I was a wee bairn like ye. But what do ye ken about it?"

MacNair shook his head, the light from the hearth painting yellow highlights on his unruly auburn hair.

"Not much, I'm afraid. You see, when mother died, she left me some papers that had been father's, and among them I found a record of how you and he had spent more than a year searching for the Cauldron. He mentioned all the lakes he had visited—and Loch More was the last on the list. Then I remembered that you lived on the edge of Loch More—and I decided to pay you a visit. I'd like to take up the search where father stopped."

Old Jock pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Ay," he mused, "ye're a braw lad, Robbie, a braw lad. Ye're yer father's son, wi' yer strang chin an' yer hair o' flame. An' there's fire in yer een, Robbie; an' I ha'e no doot if the Cauldron can be foun', ye'll fin' it. So I'll tell ye the tale.

"We maun gae back a guid mony years, Robbie, to the days when the

Sidhe an' the Pechties dwelt on the moors an' braes. For 'twas then that Tegid an' his wife, Cerridwen, came oot o' Loch Bala in Wales.

"Tegid, 'tis said, was a king, the King o' the Worl'-Unner-Watter. He was a sma' man, Robbie, sma' as yer Uncle Jock, but he was unco' fat, an' there wasna a hair on his head, so they called him Tegid the Bald. Wi' his wife, Cerridwen, he was cast oot o' his kingdom, into the lan' above the lochs.

"An' naught could he tak' wi' him, save the Cauldron, which he grabbed when they fled. 'Twas his greatest treasure, for as lang as he had it, he an' his couldna dee. For in it could be brewed the Watter o' Life.

"Because he had ta'en the Cauldron, the priests o' the Watter Worl' cursed Tegid. So long as the Cauldron wasna in its restin' place, juist that lang must Tegid, his wife, an' any offspring they might ha'e, remain wi' the accursed cook pot!

"'Twas about this time that their daughter, Creirwy, was born, an' a bonnie lass she was, more beautifu' e'en than her mither. But like them, she fell unner the curse."

JOCK DOUGAL sighed deeply. "Then tribble began. The Pechties, wha' had power o' their ain, stole the Cauldron—an' the Bald Ane began his lang years o' wanderin' ower the land an' sea, afollowin' it. The Pechties lost it to the Druids. It slipped frae their fingers, an' King Arthur came to ha'e it, no doot wi' Merlin's help, for he was a Druid.

"Bran, son o' Llyr, got it somehow, an' he ga'e it to Matholwyach, King o' Ireland. An' Matholwyach took it awa' across the sea to his castle. An' there Tegid caught up wi' it, an' fled wi' it back to Scotland, the men o' Matholwyach dreadfu' close. An' to keep it frae fallin' into their han's, he drapped it in the watters o' a Heiland loch. An' nae mair did ony mon hear o' Tegid the Bald.

"Yer father an' I went frae loch to loch, searchin' for sign o' the Cauldron. An' here, on a stane on the wee isle in the midst o' Loch More, we

found carved in the Gaelic the words, 'Tegid Voel', a name some ga'e to the Bald Ane. An' we knew we'd come to the end o' our quest. But Loch More is unco' large an' amazin' deep—an' we couldna fin' the Cauldron."

Old Jock Dougal sighed. "Then your father marrit sweet Marget, my sister, an' they made a hame in Glesca. I built my hoose here in the Heilands, an' here I ha'e dwelt for mony a year."

After a moment of silence, MacNair asked:

"And in all this time, Uncle Jock, haven't you found anything that might indicate where the Cauldron might be—or more, perhaps, about Tegid?"

"We-el—I ha'e no' seen ought o' the Cauldron, but twa years agane I saw a lass wha' might ha'e been Crierwy, the daughter o' the Bald Ane. She wasna o' this worl', I ken fu' weel—an' she was so unco' fair my auld een were dazzled by sight o' her."

"You saw Crierwy, Uncle Jock?" MacNair demanded incredulously.

Dougal chuckled. "Na, na, Robbie, lad—I said she might ha'e been Crierwy! Perchance she wasna. I dinna ken. But she might ha'e been. At ony rate, 'twas a chance to learn about the Cauldron—but yer father was deid, an' I was too auld to fash mysel' ower it."

"But ye—ye're a braw lad, Robbie, an' perchance ye can accomplish wha' my years wadna permeet."

He paused, smoking in silent thought for some moments.

"'Tis a strange story, ane that I ha'e no' told before. I dinna wish to ha'e men call me daft. But I'll tell ye the tale, an' I'll show ye the proof—at ony rate, ye can *feel* o' it, though ye canna see it."

"'Twas the heather ale that started it. Heather ale, ye ken, is a magic brew made by the Pecties. I foun' the bottle in the fall o' the year. A bonnie day it was, wi' the leaves o' the oak trees coverin' the braes wi' a carpet o' color. No' a cloud was in the sky ower a' the Heilands. An' I went oot in my wee boat to the isle in the midst o' yon loch. There's naught on't save a few pine trees an'

a heap o' stanes covered wi' ivy, the ruins o' a castle, no doot."

"A' the day I spent wi' my rod, castin' for trout. But the devil was in the loch, an' the fish juist wadna bite. Part o' the day I cast frae the isle, an' part frae the boat—but 'twas a' the same. The sun was winkin' fast behind the hills, the nicht was creepin' ower the worl', an' wi' it came a storm risin' oot o' the Nor' Sea. My creel was unco' empty, but I wadna gi'e way to despair. The stubborn bluid o' the Dougal's wadna permeet."

"So I cast an' I cast till the black o' the nicht hid the watter frae my een, then I said to mysel', 'Come awa' wi' ye, Jock—'tis time ye're gangin' hame. An' ye'll be as weel to hurry if ye dinna want a wet skin."

"I was on the isle, an' wi' my rod high ower my head, I started across the groun'. I dinna think o' the heaps o' stanes till I was pushin' my nose an' face frae ane o' the crannies, an' was spittin' oot a mouthfu' o' pine needles to mak' room for strang words. For in my fall I had made kindlin' o' my fishin' rod—a mortal waste o' guid silver!"

"I flang it awa' wi' a curse. Then my han', unner a stane, touched somethin' that felt uncon' like a bottle—an' 'twas a bottle that sloshed an' gurgled when I shook it. An' when I rose to my puir achin' limbs an' limped to the boat, the bottle gaed wi' me."

DOU GAL'S eyes glowed in the remembrance. "Oot on the loch the wind was blawin' like the devil's own. 'Twasna a soughin', whinin' wind—'twas a rantin', tantin', tearin' wind that fair cut to the morrows o' a mon. On the shore I could hear it rakin' the oak trees, rippin' awa' the leaves an' throwin' them ower the watter. 'Twas cauld—unco' cauld—an' wi' the bottle between my knees I was sair tempted."

"The wind was in my face, an' the rowin' dreafu' hard. 'Twas black as the pits o' hell, an' I couldna see twa inches before my nose. I stopped to get my bearin's—an' decided to tak' a wee smell o' the contents o' the bottle. I foun' it in the black o' the boat

at my feet, an' after strugglin' wi' a glass stopper wi' tremblin' fingers, I got it open an' held the mouth o' the bottle to my nose."

Old Jock Dougal sighed deeply. "That's ae moment, Robbie lad, I'll ne'er forget. Juist a smell o' that brew was a bit o' heaven. I canna describe it, Robbie—but I knew then that it couldna be ought save heather ale. An' like a droonin' mon graspin' a bit o' turf on the watter, I set my lips to the bottle.

"I'm no' a drinkin' mon, Robbie, but ye ken, I ha'e had my share o' whuskey. There was ane evenin' a doctor invited me in to ha'e a taste, an' we drank sax or seven rounds. The doctor couldna walk steady to the door after it, but I gaed awa' hame wi' no mair tribble than if I had ta'en watter. But that heather brew—juist a wee nip, an' I could ha'e walked on the loch!

"The wind? 'Twas juist a bonnie breeze noo. I corked the bottle wi' unco' care, an' started rowin' like a daft fool. The boat fair danced ower the waves. An' my een—they were playin' tricks, for I saw things na mortal mon should see. I wouldna tell ye, Robbie, for ye'll think I'm no' sound in the head.

"But 'twas then, lad, as I neared the shore, that I saw the lass I telt ye aboot. She was sittin' on a great rock on the bank' a wee, sobbin' burn that rins past the hoose an' splashes into the loch. She was a' dressed in a lang white robe, an' there was a licht around her like the licht ye see dancin' ower bog an' moorland. An' her face, Robbie—'twas so won'erfu' fair I couldna bear to look on't.

"I closed my een—an' when I opened them again, she was gone."

For moments after the old Scot finished his tale, there was silence in the darkened room. Rob MacNair checked a faint smile that hovered on his lips. A queer story, indeed; but his uncle was quite evidently sincere.

"But the proof, Uncle—you mentioned proof."

"Ay, an' I did." Dougal rose and crossed to a cupboard. "An' I ha'e the proof, lad—the bottle o' heather ale!"

Wonderingly MacNair waited. But as the old Scot came within the glow of the peat fire, he stood up suddenly, his eyes wide. The other's broad, blunt-fingered hand was held out before him as though wrapped around the neck of a bottle—but it was empty!

Jock Dougal chuckled at his nephew's wide-eyed stare. "Na, na, lad, dinna ye say't. My hand is no' empty, but ye canna see the bottle. 'Tis inveesible. Here—hauld it—but be carefu'! 'Tis worth its wecht in silver!"

MacNair reached out gingerly, and as his hand came into contact with smooth, cold glass that his eye could not see, he felt a chill ripple along his spine, and a startled gasp escaped him. Then he gripped the invisible bottle and ran his fingers along its curving expanse. He shook it gently, heard the fluid within splashing against the sides of the vessel.

"And—and it's really heather ale?"

Dougal's blue eyes twinkled. "Ay, Robbie, an' it is."

MacNair frowned wonderingly, adjusting his thoughts to this startling fact. Heather ale—a drink brewed perhaps a thousand years ago by a race of little men, now dead. Or were they dead? Might not they, or their descendants, be invisible, like the bottle?

AND the Cauldron—this strange bottle made belief in the Cauldron and its power far less difficult. MacNair thought of the girl his uncle had seen; and strangely, he did not, even momentarily, doubt her existence. He thought of something else.

"If it's such a wonderful drink, Uncle Jock," he asked, "why is there so much of it left?"

The old Scot sighed ruefully. "'Tisna for mon so auld as the Dougal, Robbie. I canna stand it. Once since findin' it, I took juist a wee nip, an' I wasna the same for days an' days. I saw the bottle then, an' the ale seemed alive, Robbie, glowin' like the lass on the rock. But the brew is no' for me."

"I'd like to try a drink of heather

ale, Uncle," MacNair said suddenly.

Dougal leaned his head on his shoulder, then shrugged.

"Losh, laddie—an' ye will, help yer-sel'. I'll get ye a glass," he added, crossing to the cupboard.

Removing a queerly shaped stopper, MacNair eagerly took the goblet from the old Scot, carefully tilted the unseen bottle. He could feel his pulse thudding in his temples as the invisible liquid gurgled out, and his nostrils twitched to a faint, yet delightful aroma that perfumed the air. Thrusting the bottle into Dougal's hand, he raised the glass to his lips.

Rob MacNair sipped the heather ale, rolled it on his tongue, and his lean face glowed with incredulous delight. Lord, he thought, never was there drink like this! Reluctantly he let it trickle down his throat—felt it burst like a bomb within him—felt tingling fire speed through his veins.

Weights seemed to be dropping from him, dragging weights that had held him to earth since birth. And his mind—never had it been so clear. With closed eyes he took a second sip—drained the goblet. It dropped from his fingers to shatter on the hearth-stone as he swayed in a whirling, dancing vertigo of blinding light.

He opened his eyes, eyes that saw as they had never seen before. He glimpsed a reeling image of a man at his elbow. Then, no longer able to contain the bursting, joyous spirit within him, he sprang to the door, flung it wide and dashed into the open air.

When sanity returned, MacNair found himself standing on the bank of Loch More. He flung back his head and breathed deeply of the cool night air. An incredible sense of well-being coursed through every inch of his six-foot frame. Drunk? If he were drunk, blessed be drunkenness!

His restless gaze swept over the glittering expanse of Loch More. A windless dark had fallen upon loch and glen and brooding hills. A full moon rolled over the horizon like a great golden medallion, burnished to jewel brightness by wisps of scudding cloud. Its light sought out other

clouds drifting down the flanks of Ben Hee, to mingle with the gray mist on the water, to lie there, eddying gently, like the smoke of old battles.

Then MacNair saw the isle in the middle of the loch, and his eyes grew large with wonder. He had seen it during the day, and it had been a rounded peak of earth rising above the water, with a few gnarled trees scattered upon its face. But now—now above the trees there rose the pointed towers of a castle, glittering frostily in the moonlight! A castle, ancient beyond telling, like a structure out of a dream.

He heard a faint, alien sound behind him, and he turned. Something stirred under a stunted bush. He glimpsed then a little round face with impish eyes and overgrown ears—a human face! A moment—and it was gone, the sound of faint laughter drifting back to him.

MacNair shook his head and grinned. A powerful drink, this pech-tie brew!

He stood there in momentary indecision, heard clearly the sobbing of a burn, leaping and tumbling through a cleft in the brae. It was a voice, luring him. He thought of the lass who was fair beyond telling, and his heart leaped. He strode eagerly toward the sound of running water, seeking a great flat rock where burn and loch became one.

He circled a clump of trees growing close to the water's edge, and before him lay the rock he sought. And more—upon its sloping face sat a maiden! And about her was an aura, as of moonlight shining through mist!

HESITANTLY, with bated breath, Rob MacNair moved toward the unearthly stranger, his thoughts confused, uncertain. Was she creature of a dream? A figment of his imagination, stimulated by the heather ale? Or had the brew of Picts awakened new senses, vision that perceived another realm of life?

She was clad, he saw, in a diaphanous robe of white, through which

gleamed warmly exquisite curves. Her hair was palest gold, spun about her head in an aureate cloud of glory. And her face—her face was perfection.

She turned her head and saw him, and a faintly wistful smile curved her lips. With the smile, the ethereal aura vanished, and her face became all human, the face of one inexpressibly lonely, and all the lovelier for her humanity.

MacNair spoke a timid greeting, and her features froze in joyful wonder.

"You—can see me? Can hear me?"

She spoke in the Gaelic, and her voice was sweet as the music of the burn.

"Of course," MacNair answered. Then, remembering, "You see, I drank heather ale, and it—"

"It opened your eyes!" she cried.

In a twinkling she had left the rock, light as a tendril of mist, and was at his side.

"Long and long have I waited," she breathed, "long and long, hoping, despairing—always waiting for one who might see and hear—one who could bring release!"

She drew back, surveying him with the frankness of a child, eagerness and a growing warmth in her deep blue eyes. Suddenly she laughed, a joyous, lilting sound.

"Ay, and you can do it!" she cried.

"Who—who are you?" MacNair asked wonderingly, his eyes filled with her loveliness.

"I am Creirwy, daughter of Cerridwen, and Tegid who was once King of the World-Under-Water. I dwell upon yonder isle." She whirled. "But come, sit with me upon the rock, and I'll tell you all you would know."

Like a wood nymph, she flitted to the top of the boulder. MacNair followed more slowly, picking his way over the rough ground. His mind was in a turmoil. Creirwy—even as his uncle had said! And where she was, there would be Tegid—and the Cauldron of Life! Yet the Cauldron seemed quite unimportant at that moment. Reaching the rock, he climbed upon it and sat down beside the girl.

"What do men call you, Man-with-the-hair-of-flame?" Creirwy began.

He told her; and she repeated his name slowly.

"I'll call you Rob," she said finally.

They spoke of many things, seated there in the moonlight. In moments MacNair forgot the strangeness of his companion, hardly noticing the unearthly aura surrounding her. Her laughter was so spontaneous, her words so—so alive that MacNair felt no desire save to listen while she talked.

She told him the tale of the Cauldron, memories of a childhood lived in the long-dead past. She told of the little family's arrival at Loch More, of casting the Cauldron into the depths of the lake, of the attacks of the men of Matholwych. She told of her seemingly endless waiting there beside the burn. Many had passed during the years, men of different times and races. She had spoken to them, but none had ever heard her.

Oh, yes—the little folk, the Picts, they could hear. She could see them, as they could see her—but they could not help.

She had seen battles in the forests and upon the braes. Had seen much of life and much of death.

She spoke of her father, Tegid, and her mother, Cerridwen; of the castle they had built with the aid of the Picts; of how they lived there, served by the little folk.

Then she asked questions about Rob MacNair's world—the world beyond the mountains. And MacNair told her of the works of men while she listened with shining-eyed wonder.

FINALLY Crierwy turned to him with a pleading look on her face.

"Rob," she asked anxiously, "would you aid us? Would you come with me to the isle?"

MacNair nodded. "I had planned to go out to the island. I came to Loch More seeking the Cauldron."

Her eyes widened. "Then you knew of its power? Would gain it for yourself?"

"I know very little. I only know that I want to help you—that you are

altogether lovely—and that when I look at you, I cannot think!”

He looked warmly into her deep blue eyes; then abruptly turned away, his face reddening. He arose in confusion and sprang from the rock. What ailed him? He was acting like the wee bairn his uncle had called him. Then Creirwy was at his side, smiling at him.

“Shall we go now to the isle, Rob?” she asked.

MacNair hesitated. What if the power of the heather ale failed him as it had his uncle on the night Jock Dougal had found it? He couldn’t take the chance.

“First,” he said, “I must go back to my uncle’s cottage. The effects of the heather brew may wear off, and then I would not be able to see or hear you. So I think I had better drink more of it before we start.”

Creirwy looked up at him searchingly, her gaze troubled.

“But you’ll come back?”

“At once,” MacNair smiled reassuringly. “Wait for me here.” And turning away, he sprinted toward the cottage, skirting the lake.

He reached the little dwelling and entered, to find the old Scot seated before the fireplace, smoking. Looking up, Dougal took the pipe from his mouth.

“An’ noo ye ha’e had a taste o’ heather ale.”

“Ay, Uncle Jock,” MacNair exclaimed, “and I want more of it! I’ve seen Creirwy—talked with her—and we’re going out to the island to get the Cauldron!”

Dougal peered at him sharply. “Ye’re no’ owerfu’ o’ pechtie brew, are ye, Robbie?”

“No, no, Uncle Jock! I tell you I saw her—and I don’t want to take a chance of having her disappear as she did for you.” Rapidly he described what had happened and all that had been said.

Dougal chuckled dryly. There was a bantering note in his words.

“I could mak’ guid use o’ some o’ the Watter o’ Life, Robbie, lad. ’Twad be unco’ odd to be a barin again!”

Yet despite his jocular tone, Mac-

Nair saw that his hand trembled as he knocked the ashes from his pipe.

“An’ ye’d gae back to her, Robbie?”

“Ay, Uncle Jock.”

“Knowin’ she’s naught but the ghaist o’ a lass wha’ died a thousan’ years bygone?”

For a moment MacNair hesitated. A ghost? It might be so. Then he saw a vision of Creirwy as he had first seen her, alone and forlorn, and again he nodded.

“Ay, Uncle Jock, even though she be a ghost.”

Abruptly the old Scot stood up and gripped his nephew’s shoulders with strong, blunt fingers.

“Tak’ the bottle o’ heather ale, Robbie, an’ gae back to the lass—an’ guid luck gae wi’ ye!”

Moments later MacNair was speeding down the slope toward the loch, a glowing bottle held tightly beneath one arm. As he ran, he could hear the ceaseless babble of the burn; and it was urging him to go faster, faster. Then he saw Creirwy on the rock, waiting, and he ran toward her, calling her name. She sprang to meet him, light as a breath, a joyful smile on her face.

“You have come as you said!” she said.

He reached for her hands, then, somehow, she was out of reach, shaking her head wistfully.

“You—you dare not touch me—ever!” Momentarily the joy faded from her face; as swiftly it brightened. “Unless—unless you find the Cauldron.”

“I’ll find it!” MacNair exclaimed impulsively. “I’ll find it, and then—”

He broke off abruptly. For an eternal instant their eyes locked; then Creirwy dropped her gaze and turned toward the loch. She pointed to an ancient pine.

“There lies a boat,” she said.

MACNAIR saw it beneath the low-hanging branches, half hidden in the black shadows. As he strode toward it, he tried to analyze the strange spell that had fallen upon him. It might be the heather ale—but he thought it was the witchery of

blue eyes and smiling face and lovely form. Yet he knew that Creirwy, if she were not spirit, certainly could not be mortal.

He reached the boat and, stooping, placed the bottle of heather ale upon a bit of moss. Turning the craft over, he slid it into the water. Creirwy leaped lightly into it and seated herself in the stern. MacNair picked up the oars with one hand and the precious bottle with the other, and then took his place in the middle of the boat. With the heather ale safe between his feet, he began rowing across the moonlit waters toward the island.

A strained silence followed. Macnair's mind was occupied with thoughts of what lay ahead. Creirwy seemed troubled, a cloud darkening her face. Finally, she spoke in a voice low and hesitant.

"Rob, there is something I must tell you. We are not as—as you are. Our bodies are not like your bodies. I told you that you dared not touch me, because I knew you *could* not touch me. For to your senses I do not exist, except as someone you can see and hear with the powers given you by the heather ale.

"If you find the Cauldron and can brew the Water, perhaps we may become as you are—or perhaps we can return to the World-Under-Water. Or, perchance, we may merely leave this realm for a higher one. We do not know; we can only hope. These things I have learned of my father; he will doubtless tell you more."

Her voice softened, became vibrant. "But no matter what happens, no matter what you decide to do, I am glad you have come."

A faint chill touched MacNair, as though a cold breeze had blown against the back of his neck. As old Jock had said, and as he had subconsciously believed, Creirwy was of those who had passed on. Yet not quite—for the Cauldron held her fast to earth. What should he do? There was still time to turn back.

He looked squarely at the girl, and suddenly all indecision was gone. He could not fear Creirwy, no matter what her physical form might be.

The boat scraped bottom. They had reached the isle. Grasping the bottle, MacNair stood up and leaped to shore.

"We've come to see your father," he said, and smiled. In a breath Creirwy was at his side.

"Rob!" she cried joyfully, then checked herself.

The great white castle towered above them, its snowy walls glittering like slabs of alabaster. High into the heavens it reached, seeming almost to impale the great round moon upon one of its glowing spires. Lovely gardens lay between them and the castle, gardens with flowers and shrubbery and trees like none MacNair had ever seen before. Paths of white wound through the garden to the high, peaked door of the castle. It was a scene of unearthly beauty, like the fantastic painting of a master artist.

Two figures appeared in the doorway and stood there, looking at MacNair wonderingly. Cerridwen and Tegid, MacNair thought. In the woman he could see another Creirwy—older, not quite so lovely, but obviously Creirwy's mother. But the man—at sight of Tegid, MacNair repressed an involuntary chuckle.

Tegid the Bald! He was well named, and ghost though he was, he was funny! Old King Cole with a bald pate! A little man, enormously fat, with a great, round belly and a round, hairless head. He was clad in a tunic that only half covered his thin, bowed legs. He spoke, and his voice was as deep and heavy as the booming of a kettle drum.

"Creirwy—ye have not—"

"Yes, Father, I have found a man who can see and hear us!"

Quickly she recounted her meeting with Rob MacNair, told of the heather ale, of his search for the Cauldron, and of his wish to help them.

WHEN she concluded, Tegid turned to MacNair, his round face beaming.

"I cannot tell ye how welcome ye are, Rob MacNair," he said. "For more than a thousand years I have had no one to talk with save Cerridwen and Creirwy. And in all that time, we

have been held here by the Cauldron, with release lying on the lake bottom only a few feet from shore. But there was naught I could do about it, for it requires physical strength to raise it from the water, and that I do not have. But ye have it—"

His voice rumbled on and on, but MacNair was only vaguely aware of it. He had become conscious of nausea writhing in his stomach, and his eyes were beginning to smart, as though he had stared too long at a bright light. Suddenly he blinked. He could not see the three glowing figures; and instead of a castle before him, he saw a scattered heap of ivy-covered stones, gray and drab in the moonlight.

Momentary panic seized Rob Mac-

with wide-eyed apprehension; saw her mother's countenance mirroring her daughter's expression. Then he looked down at the shattered fragments of a bottle that had once held heather ale!

It had a sobering effect, but it could not quell the leaping, reckless urge for action that possessed him. He grinned broadly at the Bald One.

"Don't get excited!" MacNair exclaimed. "I drank enough of the stuff to last a long time, and before its effect wears off, I'll have your Cauldron here, safe and sound."

"Then ye must hurry!" Tegid exclaimed. "For ye must secure the Cauldron and I must tell ye how to brew the Water of Life ere your power dies."

He hesitated for a brief instant.

FEATURED NOVELETS COMING SOON

SATAN'S SIDESHOW, by Carson Judson

THE SEAL OF SIN, by Henry Kuttner

THE CARDIGAN CURSE, by Earle Dow

THE EVIL ONES, by August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer



Nair. Then he remembered the bottle beneath his arm, and though he could no longer see it, it reassured him. Hastily he removed the stopper and tilted the bottle against his lips. Literally poured the heather ale down his throat!

For a single timeless instant the world stood still, while living fire of ecstasy flared through every atom of Robert MacNair. He was deafened, blinded, paralyzed by the enormous draft of pechtle brew. Then dimly, through stunned consciousness, he heard a crash, an ominous crash that slowly drew him back to realization of his surroundings.

He opened his eyes to meet a look of consternation on the face of Tegid the Bald. He saw Creirwy staring

"One thing I have not told ye. Ye should know that once ye have had ought to do with me and the Cauldron, ye fall under the curse—and are bound with us, no matter what befall. Knowing that, will ye help us?"

MACNAIR smiled at Creirwy, a reckless, eager smile.

"Where is the Cauldron?" he asked.

Rapidly the three led him through the garden and around the castle to a little cove between two rocks. Tegid pointed downward.

"There it lies—and ye can see it even though 'tis dark, for it has light of its own, like the heather ale."

In a moment MacNair cast off his shirt. His shoes followed, and he stood poised on the shore. With a

brief smile at Creirwy, he filled his lungs with air and plunged into the depths of Loch More.

As the dark waters closed over him, MacNair felt the first pang of misgiving. Dull wonder at his actions struggled sluggishly through his mind. Then the heedlessness resumed control, and he drove himself downward with powerful strokes, 'til directly below him he saw the yellow glow of something half buried in the mud and silt of centuries.

He reached it, gripped a length of chain caught on a jutting rock, held clear of the mud, and he tugged mightily. Slowly the Cauldron moved, as though reluctant to leave its age-long resting place. Now he raised it free of the silt—a glowing vessel of gold, studded with gems. It was not very large—about a foot in diameter—but it was incredibly heavy.

MacNair gritted his teeth. He must hurry. He could feel the blood pounding in his temples. His lungs—they needed air. Not much longer, he knew, could he hold his breath. Like a fish he twisted and sent his body within the loop of the chain fastened on opposite sides of the Cauldron. Turning, he drove toward the surface.

He hardly seemed to be moving his body! It was as though he were anchored to the bottom! And his lungs—his lungs—he must have air—must breathe! Panic gripped him. He fought madly to rise higher, higher. He thought of his Uncle Jock, of Creirwy. Then for the briefest of moments, blackness—

Rob MacNair was shooting toward the surface, the weight of the Cauldron dropping away from him. Amazing relief swept over him. He reached open air, pulled himself up on shore.

Creirwy, Cerridwen and Tegid stood just as he had left them. A different aura seemed to surround them.

"It was too heavy for the first try," he said with a smile. "But I'll get it on my next attempt."

Tegid shook his head; sadly, it seemed to MacNair.

"There will be no next attempt, Robbie."

Wonderingly, MacNair looked at Cerridwen, at Creirwy. His gaze lingered on the girl's sweet face, marveling at the compassion there. Then she was beside him, and her arms were about his neck, arms he could feel. And there was mingled grief and joy, and something warm and tender in his eyes.

"Can you not see, Robbie, that now you are—as we are?"

He stepped back, dumbly, looked down at himself, saw the glow of an aura. For an instant he could not think. Then thoughts struggled through his mind.

His lifeless body anchored to the Cauldron at the bottom of the lake—his Uncle Jock who had felt he could "mak' guid use o' some o' the Watter o' Life"—he would never see him, though he'd sit beside him in his wee hame—the broken bottle of heather ale which might have been a means of communication between them—

Rob MacNair looked down into the face so close to his own. And his arms encircled a form that was warm and alive and very real, because both now dwelt in the same strange realm. He smiled gently.

"Now we can sit upon the great rock together, Creirwy, and wait for another who can see and hear—and you need not be lonely for a long, long time."

*Follow the Amazing Exploits of George Chance, the
Magician-Sleuth, in Our Companion Magazine*

THE GHOST

NOW ON SALE

10c

AT ALL STANDS

Spider Woman

By MARIA MORAVSKY

Author of "Ten Thousand Dollar Sleep," "The Castle of Tamara," etc.



She advanced toward him, her arms outstretched

*Dread Are the Ways of Vengeance, but None More
So Than the Evil Schemings of Madam Remizova!*

THEY were weird spiders, no two alike. Madam Remizova supplied them to the studios. "Hm-m—twenty-seven assorted spiders for *Dracula Returns*."

She read and re-read the order, frowning. Her eyebrows were like twisted leeches.

She looked around the cavellike spidery. Those two blotched, monstrous ones—they would look well on a web spun across an unused doorway. Inaudibly, she murmured their names in Russian. Then she went on a tour of inspection, surveying the insects through her lorgnette.

Every detail seemed obnoxiously clear. The velvetlike bodies, the queer markings, the hoary multiple legs.

"*Horosho*," she congratulated herself for the work well done.

She took her work in dead earnest, and was never irritated when the moving picture people called her, grinning, the "embalmer of spiders" or simply "that spider woman."

"Pick up those twenty-four in a row," Madam Remizova ordered Dunia, her Russian menial, the bland-faced halfwit with pale eyes set as widely as that of a hare. "I'll have to produce an especially big one for the headliner."

She always included in her orders two or three spectacular giants. Big fat spiders with protuberant eyes and long legs, unusual either in shape or color, like that dotted monster found on the protruding tongue of the hanged in Evers' book, or the Calvary spider with dull cross on its back, the poisonous insect feared so by the Poles.

Somehow, the movie actors, most superstitious folk in the professional world, believed that Madam Remizova could change the shapes of her "props" at will.

They spoke of selective breeding, of clever faking, but the unspoken opinion about her spiders made them avoid Madam Remizova's estate. An estate surrounded by unnaturally tall eucalyptus trees, with artificial spider caves and pools inhabited by giant, loudly croaking frogs.

"Those fantastic Hollywood thrill-makers delight in the bizarre," the spider woman sighed, sending her imagination along the tortuous, forbidden paths.

If she could give them a spider fit for *Dracula Returns*, matching a certain foreign actor's sinister ability in the rôle, the movie people might see fit to give the repulsive insert a close-up shot.

"Spiders by Madam Remizova"—what a good advertisement that would be!

The spider woman savored the possible credit. Yes, she must produce an unusual spider, even if she had to resort to those practices which at times

took the place of her deft fingers.

She put on her widow's weeds, which she had worn constantly for years, except in her laboratory. Here, rumor had it, she always entered unclothed, or wearing a black mesh of silk-net underwear. She looked very decorous in her tight dress of misty black foulard, with a yellowed brooch in the shape of a lopsided cross, as she walked now toward the general store in the Hollywood suburb. A store theatrically called "The Horn of Plenty."

Ironical customers had shortened the name to "Horn," and called the store owner "The Hornet." He had never been popular, in spite of his everlasting smile and the free cigars he dispensed on election days.

Loud rumors linked him constantly with loan sharks.

"Here comes the spider woman!" The man's barefooted houseboy ran from the dusty yard and hid himself behind the counter.

A heavy grunt greeted the boy's action.

"I told you, Ryan, not to employ child labor," the village sheriff spoke up, half in earnest, half in rebuke. He was buying a plug of tobacco and indulging in a chiding argument with the owner, as usual.

"That 'fraid cat boy gives even me the creeps, with the tales he spreads about some of your customers!"

RYAN, a portly and purple-faced man of uncertain age, bloated from too many drinks, went reluctantly to meet Madam Remizova.

"What can I do for you, lady?" he asked with his customary smirk.

The Russian woman looked at him quizzically.

"I would like a few words with you, in private. No hurry! I'll wait until the sheriff leaves. Do attend to your customer, please."

All the while the woman's slightly slanted bright eyes darted up and down his body, acting as a mental yardstick. Those looks disturbed even Ryan's rhinocerosous consciousness.

"She looks at me as if measuring me for a coffin," he thought uneasily, and a creepy feeling crawled up his

spine. But, always the business man, he pointed obligingly to a cubicle where he kept his safe.

"In that corner. Do sit down, Madam. Sheriff Corcoran is gone. Don't you hear his motorcycle roaring?"

Ryan pointed to the road which had swallowed his caustic customer in a cloud of dust.

"So close to Hollywood, and we still suffer from dust in Happy Valley," he muttered. "Now, if they elected me, we would have all the main roads oiled by now— Well, what is it you wanted to see me about?"

"It's about a loan." The spider woman talked rapidly, as if repeating a story learned by heart. "I know you charge twenty per cent—"

"Who told you? I—I never—"

"Never mind who. People here owe you money. They sent me and told me to keep it secret. I won't tell a living soul that you are a usurer, Mr. Ryan."

She said the last few words with relish. Frank contempt shone in her eyes.

"Sh! Sh!" he said nervously. "What security can you offer?"

"My Spider Farm, of course. You know it's free and clear."

After a few minutes of haggling over the details, she signed some innocently worded document. She waited discreetly at the counter while Ryan manipulated the heavy old-fashioned safe.

A few more minutes, and the money was in her bag.

"Remember, the payment falls due June thirteenth!" he admonished her. "I'll pay you in full before that. But—you must come and collect it in person. I cannot be bothered walking down to your store all the way from the Sierras. My house is a good mile from here, and so is the post office; and my car is in hock—held by an insect like yourself!" She fairly spat the last words.

The usurer cringed, parted with her without a word. If he had to collect, he would, of course, do it personally. His business could not bear investigation.

Madam Remizova returned home, drank a glass of weak Russian tea with lemon and *varenie*, took a shower,

and sent her menial to the telegraph office with this message:

ATLAS STUDIOS.

WILL SEND SPIDERS PARCEL
POST JUNE THIRTEENTH.

MADAME REMIZOVA.

ON THE thirteenth of June a queer assortment of props was being chloroformed and packed into one of those small black coffinlike boxes which Madam Remizova made especially for her wares. One of her insects, big, succulent, with legs unusually long and thick for a spider, purple in color and repulsive in form, could not fit into the package. Without hesitation, she grabbed a pair of shears and snipped the end off its legs.

Blood spurted forth, real red blood unlike the fluid which circulates in spiders' bodies. The Russian menial looked on with awed face.

"Bring me the wax, quick!" her mistress ordered.

She dabbed at the spider's legs with a piece of waste which she immediately burned, then carried the insect to her laboratory desk. The servant was there already, melting the wax. When it was of the right consistency, Madam Remizova kneaded it as a sculptor would knead clay, and attached two lumps of it to the spider's mutilated extremities. Waving the insect to and fro, she waited for the wax to harden.

"Why, I thought he was quite dead—" she muttered to herself.

To make sure, she applied more chloroform to the spider's head. It twitched once and grew still.

"Serves you right!" the woman said placidly, then felt of the wax.

It was semi-hard now. She sculptured a semblance of spider's claws. Then, using tiny, almost invisible wire, she reinforced the waxy feet to the shortened legs.

The spider looked now even more grotesque than before.

"Here! Stop grimacing at me," Madam Remizova said to the menial, packing her handiwork with the other spiders. "Better look down the road and tell me who is coming!"

The girl ran out noiselessly and re-

turned, gasping. She made a few signs with her mobile hands.

"Hm-m— So soon," Madam Remizova muttered to herself, in answer to the mute girl's sign language.

Unperturbed except for the slight twitching of her sensuous mouth, the spider woman addressed the package. As she handed it to the still frightened girl, instructing her to take it to the village post office, a tall, leathery-faced man chugged up and dismounted from his motorcycle.

"Oh, Mr. Corcoran, delighted to see you!" Madam Remizova said with gushing, exaggerated cordiality.

"Sorry, lady, this is no social visit." Corcoran frowned at her outstretched hand. "Today I represent the law. Mr. Ryan has disappeared, I wonder if you—"

The spider woman's eyebrows twisted spasmodically, like disturbed leeches. Then her face cleared.

"Oh, you have nothing to worry about! He was here a short time ago, collecting—hm-m—something I borrowed from him. He is probably at the corner saloon."

THE sheriff shook his head.

"No, he is not there. His wife saw him coming in this direction. His daughter followed him secretly right down here. He was seen entering your place, but never came out. Sorry, Mrs. Remizova, but you are under suspicion."

The Russian woman shrugged her frail, narrow shoulders.

"You may search the premises," she said placidly.

The search revealed nothing suspicious. Back in her reception room, Corcoran questioned her with skillfully veiled threats.

"No, you can't arrest me," Madam Remizova said. "I know your foxy tactics! You can't cook up any technical charge against me."

"And why not?" the sheriff asked, playing with the handcuffs at his belt.

"Better stop questioning me and go home," she said evasively. "Or you may overstay— Well, to be perfectly frank, this place is not healthy for your breed."

"So now you threaten me."

"No, I'm just warning you. Look out!"

The spider woman pointed to a small dark object at his elbow.

Corcoran started at first, then laughed grimly.

"One of your props! Why, that spider is dead."

"Don't be too sure, Sheriff."

Madam Remizova narrowed her eyes. Their look bored into his. Corcoran tried to avert his face, but his head grew dizzy. Things began to move around him, inanimate things. The desk grew into two desks, then three.

And on each desk there lay an inch-long dark spider.

"It's the dreaded black widow spider. Extremely poisonous," Madam Remizova said coolly.

As she said it, the spiders began to move. At first they crawled slowly, like half-drowned flies; then began to sprint, their long legs carrying them closer and closer to the sheriff's startled eyes.

"Call off your pests, you witch!" Corcoran cried, whipping out his gun. "Or else—"

Madam Remizova knew when she was defeated.

"I'll tell you where to look for Ryan. On the set of *Dracula Returns*. You may find him there tomorrow."

Sheriff Corcoran rushed at once to the blatantly new set. Carpenters were finishing it, stagehands spreading enormous artificial webs in the family tomb of Draculas. His deputies poked at the sawdust methodically, looked in all the corners, then shamefacedly reported failure to their chief.

"She said—tomorrow," Corcoran mused. "Hm-m—I must send some men to watch her property."

The shrubbery was alive that night with armed, crouching men. Madam Remizova serenely walked in her garden, whistling *Dark Eyes*, and eating small spiders cunningly made of chocolate.

Next day the police invaded the Atlas movie studio again. This time they did not need to search for long. In the far corner, by *Dracula's* coffin, there lay the horribly mutilated body of Ryan. Both his feet were cut off,

and the blood obviously stopped by hardened wax.

AS SHERIFF'S deputies carried the body out, they broke the clever artificial web spread over the main entrance. Its maker, a small, wiry man, cried out indignantly:

"Hey, can't you carry that spider out the side entrance? You're ruining my work!"

"You shouldn't call him names!" someone reproached him. "Don't you see the man is dead?"

"And good riddance! What was he if not a blood-sucking spider? Everybody knew him for a money lender—at twenty percent. He bled me, too."

"Oh, so that's how the land lies! You'd better come along with us!"

The frightened little man pleaded his innocence. He produced an iron-clad alibi.

As soon as they let him go, he cranked his prehistoric car and rushed over to Madam Remizova's.

"You overplayed your hand this time," he told her without any preliminaries.

"Josef, calm yourself. Sit down and have some tea."

The spider woman led him into her living room, dominated by a life-sized portrait in oils.

"Who is that?" the web-maker asked.

His hostess looked at the handsome, ineffectual face with large, somewhat puzzled eyes and round, unaggressive chin. The eyes seemed to follow her, a simple painter's trick.

"He was my husband. Money lenders ruined him," she sighed.

"I might have known," said her visitor.

For a long while neither of them said a word. The tea kettle began to whistle, as the water came to a boil.

"Reminds me of a samovar," Madam Remizova said reminiscently.

"You sold your silver one to the movies?"

"Yes. They wanted it for a Russian scene. But I really don't mind. It's lots of bother to prepare a samovar in real Russian style. Would you believe it—in the picture, the maid just pours boiling water into it!"

They both smiled at American ignorance in the matter of samovars and continued to converse about matters of long ago. Neither of them mentioned Ryan's corpse.

At the end of the visit, the little man stretched his right hand toward Madam Remizova, palm up.

"No, Josef! I won't pay you for your silence. You kept it for so long, you may keep it a while longer. Whatever made you—"

The two seemed to read each other's minds, conversing in their interrupted sentences and sighs.

"They cut my pay at the studios. Times are hard. I must have some additional income."

"And so you resort to blackmail."

Madam Remizova got up from her fake renaissance chair with dragon heads and clawing eagles carved in relief on its uncomfortable back. She quivered with rage, so that all the stylized beasts decorating that throne-like chair seemed angrily alive in the trembling aura of her fury.

"I guessed it the moment you came! Not only usurers are spiders."

SHE advanced toward him, her hands outstretched. Those plump hands grew thinner and darker every moment, changing their human shape.

"No!" the little man screamed, retreating with his mouth open in stark awe. "You can't do that to me!"

"Yes. You drank my tea. You have looked into my eyes. Look again!"

Against his will, the suddenly subdued man looked into a myriad of eyes which multiplied as quickly as ripples in stone-stirred water. After awhile, his hands and legs started changing, too, to bear an amazing resemblance to Madam Remizova's stage props.

When her servant came in, the half-wit saw a whirling cloud of dark dust, slowly settling down and resolving itself into a new spider web. The web weaved itself over the side entrance door. And in the middle of it there hung a small, thin, long-legged spider.

"Well, Dunia, don't stare as if you have never seen me at work!" her mistress snapped at her, then threw back her slightly disheveled head and laughed musically.

"And in his own web, too! *Smieshno!*"

The girl understood only the last word in Russian, and a glimpse of dull rebellion crossed her stolid face. She shook her head negatively, without a smile.

"So she doesn't think it funny," Madam Remizova mused. "It means I'll have to change her, too. Or it may be too late—"

It was too late. That night the menial servant girl made a secret trip to the village. She could not convey much to the sheriff by her grotesque signs, but the result of her visit was that the untiring pack of law officers, led by Sheriff Corcoran, rode over to Madam Remizova's estate again, raising dust down the country road.

This time there was the *corpus delicti*, and they gathered from Dunia's signals that there might be another. The first one was found where Madam Remizova herself said they would find it. That alone was enough evidence to arrest her.

Again they found nothing suspicious at Spider Farm, but there were people who testified that the web-maker was last seen entering his countrywoman's house. They had also heard muffled screams. All that finally put the spider woman behind the bars.

During the trial she sat, unmoved, on the hard bench in the Hall of Crimes, answering most of the questions with a curt "yes" or "no." Never once did she contradict herself.

"How did you know where we would find Ryan's body?" the prosecutor asked her.

"I had a dream. I often have clairvoyant dreams," she repeated again and again, fingering the dull white cross pinned to the black velvet bodice of her old-fashioned dress.

It was the doctor's statement which helped her. He opined with utmost assurance:

"The defendant is too frail to drag Ryan's body any distance. The examination shows that Ryan was dead some hours before he was found on the Dracula set. There is nothing to indicate that she put him there."

The jurors argued for hours. In spite of the lack of evidence, all

of them felt that Madam Remizova was guilty. They did not really debate her guilt. They just discussed the circumstances.

Much as they disliked the defendant, they could not render a decision free of reasonable doubt. When they filed out, the spider woman did not even look at their faces. She acted as if she already knew the verdict.

"Not guilty," the foreman said.

After it was all over and she had walked out of the gloomy hall into the fierce California sunshine, once more a free woman, Madam Remizova glanced suspiciously behind her. Yes, that youngest juror whose face looked so puzzled during the trial was following her.

"If you must spy after me," she addressed him amiably, "let's walk together. Do you hope to unearth some new evidence?"

HE blushed, embarrassed. It was grotesque to see that rough-faced six-footer blush like a girl.

"I'm Tom McGrath, Ryan's former cowhand," he confessed frankly. "But they did not know it when they called me to serve on the jury. He—I mean, the deceased, used to rustle cattle."

"He also used to lend money at twenty percent," Madam Remizova stated with a grim smile.

"Let me shake hands with you." The young man offered his calloused right palm.

They shook hands like conspirators.

"Would you like to see my spidery?" Madam Remizova asked cordially.

"I don't mind if I do," he said bashfully.

They walked in silence, the man trying to adjust his broad stride to her mincing steps. In spite of her outdoor activities, Madam Remizova still wore high French heels which dated her as much as her high coiffure.

"I'm dying to see how you do it," the man ventured at last.

"I don't understand what you mean," she said perfunctorily.

"Oh, yes, you do. Old money lender Crombie disappeared under similar circumstances. Then that pawnbroker from Happy Valley; I forget his name. And now—Ryan."

"Are you sorry for them?" Madam Remizova demanded.

"Well, no—" he said dubiously.

"Then don't ask foolish questions!" she snapped at him. Then her voice grew mollified. "Well, here we are at last."

She held open the garden gate for him. It was thickly entwined with passion vine, the purple flowers shedding pungent fragrance which seemed to conceal some other odor, as that of decay.

"All right, if you are so curious, come into my spidery. We may have tea sent there."

"Oh, no, not there!" young McGrath said, almost in a panic.

"Why? I'm too old to—to flirt with you?" the spider woman said coyly.

"Madam, please, excuse me. I would rather not see your laboratory. I—I heard about it. Just tell me what you can."

"Curiosity killed the cat," she stated playfully. "But you seem to be a nice boy. You resemble somewhat my late husband."

PIOUSLY Madam Remizova made the sign of the three-cornered orthodox cross over her dark-clad bosom.

"I wouldn't think of harming you. Come into my library, instead, and I'll show you something."

The library held only a few Russian books which rested on home-made shelves and an enormous, tattered Dahl dictionary. She moistened her fingers and rustled its pages until she came to a certain word. The boy could not read it as it was spelled in Russianized Greek characters. But he understood the pictures she showed him.

A woman in black held in her hands a wax figurine, apparently molding it. On the stone slab in front of her lay a daguerreotype of a man with a repulsive, narrow-mouthed face. The woman was molding a spider in his likeness.

The next picture was even more enlightening. There was now a spider's web spun over the frame. And in the middle of that web hung a dead, dried-out spider.

Without a word, Madam Remizova

shut the book. The dust, raised from it, made her visitor sneeze.

"Shall we have our tea now?" she asked conversationally.

As they drank the fragrant tea, the young man was silent, his tanned forehead creased by a frown, debating with himself. He was at a loss what to do. He did not really pity the mysteriously murdered money lender. Yet all his religious upbringing made him protest against condoning the silence about the crime.

"Two *kopecks* for your thoughts," Madam Remizova tried to be playful.

"I really must tell the authorities what I saw here." The young man's rigid honesty asserted itself. He rose and started to go.

"Brought up as a Puritan, eh? I understand. But don't go yet," she fawned on him, her smile fearful to behold.

"I must," he said flatly.

"But—you can't!" The spider woman's slightly protruding eyes were focused on his, rendering him speechless with nameless dread.

"There is still another way of doing it." Young McGrath knew that she suggested the murderous transformation.

"A more pleasant way," Madam Remizova went on. "You were curious how I do it? Wouldn't you like to know more about my methods? When one works with spiders, one involuntarily takes on some of their characteristics."

The boy rushed forward, almost collided with the woman's face, because now she was as tall as he. No, taller! She seemed to tower above him, her upper lip covered with sparse, black hairs which looked repulsive, yet attractive to him, against his will. He felt a curious tingling sensation, as when a limb goes asleep.

He felt—*shrinking!* Not from the woman's suddenly multiplied hands, but actually shrinking. Only his eyes seemed to bulge, then split into myriads of smaller eyes, each one seeing with terrifying clarity the amorous muzzle of a giant black spider.

Dim recollection of his childhood hobby came to young McGrath's mind. At eleven, he used to collect insects.

Among butterflies, doodle bugs and dragon-flies, he saw, in his memory, the insect with the tell-tale red marks, the poisonous black spider called—Now, what was its name?"

"Black Widow!" he suddenly remembered.

YOUNG Tom McGrath was now a puny little spider himself. He tried to wrench himself from the terrible embrace of his domineering mate, but she held him close. So close that he was suffocating, while her black hairy mouth pressed closer and closer. A maddening memory seared his brain. "Female spiders devour their mates!"

Faintly, as from the dim distance, came Remizova's reassuring voice.

"I don't. I just suck their blood and use the dried out carcass for spider forms. Perfectly simple and—just. All the spiders I ever supplied to the studios were money lenders. This is a departure from the usual procedure."

"What? What does she mean?" McGrath's terrified unuttered thought was answered in a hissing whisper.

"Curiosity—killed—the rooster—"

With a desperate effort he tried to strike her. Even as his hand closed, forming a fist, he saw with the corner of one of his innumerable eyes that it was no longer a human fist, but a curiously shaped deformity of a paw!

With all his puny might, Tom McGrath struck. Whitish liquid spurted from the spider woman and trickled down his hairy extremity. He realized that he had hurt Madam Remizova. He must have hit her where he aimed—between the eyes.

Those eyes now closed, and he was no longer aware of their multiple mesmerizing look. His body, a moment ago, taut like a wire, began to relax by degrees. He grew larger; he could feel his legs thickening, lightening. His head no longer swam.

The dread black widow spider, which a moment ago held him in threatening embrace, grew smaller in proportion to his gradually enlarging body. A moment more, and it was just an inch-long insect, lying motionless on the table,

"You—you hypnotized me into imagining things, you wicked woman!" young McGrath shouted at his hostess, but heard no response. She was nowhere in the room.

He got up from the chair, his legs still shaky, his eyes still seeing double. Gradually his faculties returned to him, as he tried valiantly to concentrate on his search. Where was that woman?

The mute Russian servant girl came in and cleaned the table, carrying away the cups. Then she returned from the kitchen, a crumb brush in her hands. While sweeping crumbs from the table, she glanced at the large spider lying near the teapot.

Her pasty face grew still whiter, her eyes distended with mute horror. A weird sound, half a sob, half laughter, was forming in her throat. Choking with it, she threw herself on the floor and noiselessly beat her bare feet against the rug's thick, checkered surface.

When Tom McGrath recovered his composure sufficiently to summon the sheriff, his deputies searched in vain for Madam Remizova. Sheriff Corcoran came across a box of chocolate bon-bons shaped like spiders, and had to laugh.

"You must have imagined all the story you told us, McGrath. That Russian woman was a great practical joker. I must admit she scared even me once," he threw out his chest, "with one of these."

He picked up a battered black spider lying near the box, and dropped it as if it were a piece of hot coal.

"What's that? That was no chocolate candy. That's—why, it's real! A black widow spider. Good God, it's dead!"

He took out a large handkerchief and started to wipe his half-bald head. As he did so, a misty form resembling a black widow, only lighter, ran out of its folds and disappeared into the spidery.

The sheriff shivered, in spite of the hot summer afternoon.

"By golly, if I were superstitious, I would think it was her wicked soul!" he said, throwing away the sweat-dampened cotton square.

Seance

By OLGA L.
ROSMANITH

*Author of "Good-by to Vienna,"
"The Consul's Wife," etc.*

*While the Medium Mocks
Death's Dignity, His Wife's
Bad Conscience Conjures
Up Strange Phantoms!*

THE medium arranged the room for the seance while his wife looked on with contempt.

"Bells and trumpets," she said. "You mock the dignity of death. It's simply detestable."

Her husband was unruffled.

"Funny, your conscience didn't wake up till your old man left you some money. You were glad enough to help when it meant you could eat."

She leaned inside the doorway looking white and unhappy.

"I didn't know you were a fake till after I'd married you. I hated it. But people will do anything when they're desperate."

"Or believe anything," he retorted. "They want bread for their souls like you want bread for your body."

"Bread for their souls! You're blasphemous. You talking about souls. Well, you won't do it after tonight. I'm going to expose you. I'm not going to let you ruin another heart-broken gullible little widow."

He left the phonograph he was preparing and came to her, exasperated hatred on his cruel clever face. He caught her by her frail birdlike wrists and held her against the wall.

"Don't be a fool Lallie. Your dough won't last. What'll we do for dough if you spoil the racket? What would you do if I kicked you out? Work? I should say not. You haven't the strength of a sparrow."



The apparition spoke to his wife

She hadn't. She tried to release her hands but her fingers fluttered ineffectually.

"Let me go," she said. "You make me ill. Let me go."

He held on, staring with disgust into her paper-white face. "So you

think you're good? You've got a conscience? You learn all my tricks so you can live off me, and when you don't have to, you go pious on me. You want to leave me, don't you? But first you'll kick me in the gutter. So that's a conscience!"

SHE stared back at him, eyes brave and steady.

"All I ask is this—stop doing it! Let's move to another town. Do some decent work that doesn't destroy people."

"Destroy people! Now look here woman, I know plenty things like psychology. They get more'n their money's worth. I give them nerve when they lose it, and cheer 'em up when their folks die. I'm a benefactor!"

"You're a lying fraud, doing serious damage. Mrs. Hay took her life when you'd got all her savings, and you're all set to do the same with Mrs. Palmer's legacy."

A clock chimed nine. The medium gave his wife a rough shake and pushed her up the stairs.

"Come on, you hysterical fool. Get out of the way before they start coming."

She stumbled upwards in front of him. It was useless to offer resistance. She lay down gladly when he pushed her on the bed. He looked at the old door lock but the key was missing. He looked back at her and saw mutinous obstinacy in her watchful gaze. He took a sheet from the bed and tore it into broad strips with his thin steel-strong hands. She lay without protest while he bound her and tied a gag over her mouth.

"Sorry," he said, "but you asked for it." Bitter contempt narrowed the lids of her steady eyes. He lifted his clenched fist in a murderous gesture. "You wait till it's over!"

Downstairs a bell rang. In a moment he was the grave clairvoyant, relaxed, suave, his face ready for his gentle smile. His wife began to work to free herself as soon as she heard him running down the stairs.

Mrs. Palmer, the plumpish widow, was the first arrival. She had come early on purpose hoping to get a word

alone with him. He took her into the little parlor where his clients gathered prior to the seance. He did not believe in allowing them time and a good light in which to look about them.

The crepe-clad old lady calmed his unease. She looked so much better, it was a miracle. And he had worked it! She was smiling cheerfully as she pushed a fat little wallet in his hand.

"You've helped me so much," she explained. "I want to help your great work. This is to give sittings to people too poor to pay for them."

The medium accepted her offering with dignity.

"That is most generous Mrs. Palmer. I have a special fund for that very purpose. See, here it is."

He pushed up the cover of an old roll-top desk and pointed out the drawer marked "Special Fund."

The widow watched him put her money away with tears in her eyes, but the smile lingered on her face. A thought eddied through her mind like the first November wind—what shall I do when my money is all gone? She had a feeling of guilt as he closed the desk, but she was wax in the hands of this good, this wonderful man. He transmitted his own altruistic emotions.

The front doorbell rang again, and presently the gathering of three men and five women was complete. The medium led them into the seance room dimly lit with a red light. Indicated their places and started the phonograph. The amplifier was muffled and emitted a soft dreamy music.

Now the medium, nerves tense and ears straining caught the faint sounds of struggle overhead. Sweat beaded his forehead and a cold dew sprang into his palms. Should he go and see if she were really secure? But of course she was. He forced himself to concentrate on the task before him as the music came to an end.

Now he put out the red light and went through his routine efficiently. Bells tinkled. A phosphorescent trumpet rose, floated about and blew a faint note in the air. He became aware that the two strangers who had been sceptical at first were becoming

impressed. Funny, how he felt waves of feeling coming out of people.

Maybe he did cheat. He had to. But he had strange feelings at times of being on the verge of *something*. Whatever Lallie thought of him, there was *something* there. He shivered. He'd rather there wasn't. If he ever did get in touch, he would die of fright.

He pulled in his wandering thoughts. It needed histrionic skill to put over those hoarse faltering speeches of Mr. Palmer, and the widow would be expecting special service tonight.

"I saw what you did, Minnie," he croaked thickly, "and I'm very pleased with you—"

It was then that he felt a rush of cold air and realized that the secret door in the wall had been opened behind him in the dark. It took all his will power not to move and betray the fact that he was not in a mediumistic trance. He pressed his right foot on a lump under the carpet and a bell jangled in a far corner.

"You tell them or I'll tell them," his wife whispered softly in his ear.

"Let me alone this once and I'll do anything you like," he whispered back.

"You do it or I'll do it," she said, implacably. "I mean it."

SHE had him in a tight spot, but he had nothing to lose by being resourceful. He made sounds indicating he was coming out of his trance.

"Friends," he said weakly, "something is wrong tonight. My wife is ill. She needs me. Her necessity is calling me back."

Chairs scraped and a murmur of sympathy came from the invisible company. But the bluff failed. Lallie moved adroitly out of his reach before anyone could get up and reach the light. Her voice came out of the dark, low and unhurried, but unmercifully distinct.

"He's a liar. Go away all of you. Get your money back. I'm his wife. I tell you he's a fraud."

People collided with each other as everybody moved at once. Mrs. Pal-

mer's voice was shrill with wrath and excitement.

"You mean I never really got through to my husband?"

"You did not Mrs. Palmer. My husband cannot assist you or anyone else to communicate with the dead."

Someone found the light switch and the medium saw that the secret door was closed and his wife gone. He wanted to run after her and catch her before she escaped from the house, but his clients would not let him go. They demanded their money back, threatened him with prosecution. He gave Mrs. Palmer back her wallet, distributed the rest of the money, at the same time begging them to believe that he was a true medium and an honest man.

"You have witnessed my secret grief," he explained, "delusions on the part of my wife."

One of the two strangers, more judicious than the rest, told him not to worry. He would assist him to vindicate himself. He could arrange an expert investigation.

They went one by one and the medium sighed with relief when he shut the door on the last of them. He stood there in the silence with murder boiling in his heart. He wouldn't dare touch her now with all these witnesses of her provocation, but one of these days he'd have his own back. She'd run off and left him anyhow. He could feel with that strange sixth sense of his that she was no longer in the house.

He needed action to calm him down. He dismantled the things in the seance room and packed them ready for a quick exodus to another city. Then he sorted and burned most of the contents of his desk. Hatred ran through him like a poison as he did so. I'll get her yet, his thoughts drummed, I'll get her yet.

He went upstairs in the small hours. He saw her when he opened the bedroom door, her body half on and half off the bed, but still imprisoned by his stoutly tied bonds. His hair crept on his skull. He didn't want to be a real medium, but he knew what he would find before he touched her. She was dead

His Name on a

By

MANLY WADE
WELLMAN

*Author of "For the Love of a Witch,"
"The Day of the Conqueror," etc.*



"The bullet marked with your name will

The Name in Lead Was His—and He

Bullet

CHAPTER I

Passage of Death

THE story told me by Clay Harned may not be true, but he was plainly convinced that it was true. He was about to die, and he knew it, and men of his sort hate to drag a lie with them into the next world.

He described how, in late April of 1861, he left his father's farm and went to Richmond to join a company of Colonel Allen's Second Virginia Infantry. He and some neighbor boys walked for two days, and when they passed the bend of Bush Creek, tucked between pine groves, one lad said:

"Here's the place where old Witch Bate lives. Let's go hear our fortunes."

They went, and by now it was dull gray evening. The witch sat on the stoop of her cabin, with a red blanket pulled over her shoulders. When they told what they had come for, she took a silver piece from each, built a hardwood fire and let it burn down to embers. She looked into the embers, and talked.

They all laughed at her first fantastic pronouncement—that the war with

A Complete Novelet of Eerie Witchcraft



bring your death," the witch said

Knew that Death Couldn't Touch Him!

the Yankees would last four years. Perhaps their laughter vexed her, for she looked up at Clay Harned—he was nineteen, the oldest and biggest of the party.

"I'll tell your fortune quick," she said. "There's a bullet marked with your name. It'll bring your death with it."

The laughter died somehow on Clay Harned's mouth, which, at the time, was a handsome mouth. He said no more, and neither did the others. They listened soberly as she told other fortunes, mostly doleful. This one to lose a leg, that one to be blinded, another to be shot on the day he became a sergeant, and Willie Thompson, the youngest of the group, to be captured at a battle which would take place at a town they'd never heard named, a northern town called Gettysburg. When she was done, she shut up her old mouth with a snap, and stared beady-eyed into the embers.

Silently they walked away. They camped shortly afterward, and some sort of uneasiness caused them to watch by the fire, turn and turn about. Clay Harned's watch came at midnight, and about the middle of it a soft fall of feet on the trail made him start up, staring and breathing hard. But it was a woman, a young woman.

She had a hot, dark-eyed beauty about her. Her face was pallid even in the orange firelight, and her short, full lips looked as if she had eaten blood.

"I'm Jen Bate," she said softly. "Witch Bate's granddaughter." Clay Harned saw this must be so, for she would look like Witch Bate some day, no matter what her beauty was now. "I want to talk to you, Clay Harned."

"How did you know my name?" he challenged.

Jen Bate did not answer at first.

"My grandmother told you the truth when she said a bullet was marked with your name, and that it was able to kill you whenever fired," she said. "I can't unsay that fortune. But—" she paused, and eyed him as a cat eyes a fish—"what would you give if I saved you alive from this war?"

"There may not even be a war," he told her. "I've heard that those Yan-

kees don't like to fight. And if there was, how would I know it was you who saved me?"

"You'd know," she replied. "Look!" She held out her hand. He bent to peer.

It was plain to see in the firelight, a bullet.

Clay Harned, telling me the story long afterward, showed me what he said was that same bullet. It was a Minié ball, shaped like a cylinder with one end bluntly pointed. The other end, the flat base, had a little iron cup set in, for the powder explosion to drive in, expanding the lead to grip the riflings of the barrel.

It was something close to half an inch in diameter. Just a Minié ball, in every way but one. It was marked with a name. I saw the name, too, incised or stamped into the lead across the nose, somewhat like the stamped letters in an identity disk of the World War. Small block capitals read:

CLAY HARNED

"That's how I know your name," said Jen Bate. "It took a real piece of witchcraft—not easy and not safe—to bring this bullet into my possession. But take it." She dropped it into his hand. "Now," she said, "you are safe from any other death. You'll see. And when the war's over, come back. You and I will be married."

She was gone. Clay Harned turned the bullet over and over. It felt cold and clammy, as if it had laid long in the bottom of a pool. Finally he dropped it into his pocket. When he came to Richmond and got a fine gray uniform with blue piping and fire-gilt buttons, he put that bullet in his fob. He thought of it as a curiosity, no more.

YOU will remember that the Second Virginia was with Jackson's Brigade at the First Manassas. There were few in either army who had ever seen a battle before. It seemed to Clay Harned as if a suddenly crazy deity had stirred together all the supply of thunder and lightning and hurricane that should have lasted the

world for a century to come, and had dumped it out upon Henry Hill.

It was hot, too, stiflingly hot. Yet Harned stood where he was told to, albeit his stomach felt all stuck together, and his jaws set until they were tired.

In the midst of the noisy, clumsy fighting, General Bee stopped the retreat of his own shattered brigade by shouting:

"There stands Jackson like a stone wall. Rally behind the Virginians!"

A moment later Jackson's whole brigade fixed bayonets, moving forward and driving back the wavering Union line. The brigade withstood a withering fire of shrapnel and held the new position. Clay Harned was untouched, though half his company fell in that charge. A little later his captain, Deversham, sent him to where Jackson sat impatiently on his sorrel charger.

"You're the man who's going to carry a message?" the general demanded crisply through his dark fan of beard. "Here, then, take this to General Bee."

Someone motioned toward a riderless horse, and Harned mounted and rode across to Bee's command, now formed again and ready to fight. Bee, covered with dust and sweat, took the message, read it and penciled something on the back.

"Carry this to General Jacks . . ." he began.

A shell tore up the earth, tossing a high fountain of fragments upward. For a moment Harned saw one fragment, a great jagged thing like a potsherd, hanging over him in the sky.

"It is the end!" he thought. He felt a touch of pulsing red-hot fire at the right side of his abdomen. And then, the fragment was upon him. No, missing him, though he was swayed by its wind. But General Bee spun out of his saddle, stricken senseless and dying.

An orderly knelt by the general. Bee's second in command roared at Harned:

"Don't gape, man! Take the message to Jackson!"

It was not until he got back to Jackson that Harned had a moment to

fumble and see what had jumped and touched him with heat. It was the bullet, the leaden lump marked with his name, in his fob pocket. He drew it out, gingerly, and it vibrated in his fingers like a leaf in a gale. It had gone as slimy cold as a bit of dead meat.

Repocketing it, he got off the borrowed horse and ran to his company again.

By that time, the Southerners had moved forward. Their enemy retreated, broke and fled. If any of the commanders had listened to General Jackson's plea for ten thousand troops, he would have captured Washington for them that night. But General Jackson had been nicknamed Stonewall for only a few hours then, and the Confederacy had not yet learned the inestimable value of listening to him.

CHAPTER II

The Saving Charm

AFTER that first wild struggle of amateurs, came a summer and winter of drill, with a bit of skirmishing. Jackson's brigade lay across the Shenandoah Valley, and no invaders dared challenge him. In the spring, with Jackson promoted to chief of division, came reinforcements, expansions, and a new election of officers.

Clay Harned had gained a reputation as a man of courage and resource. He was chosen a lieutenant.

He led his men in the forefront at Winchester, when Jackson drove the wretched Banks across the Potomac like a hare. He was promoted to captain and assigned to Jackson's staff after the fighting around Richmond. To please the devout commander, Clay Harned gave up smoking and took up praying.

On May 1, 1863, as the opposing armies faced each other on the banks of the Rappahannock near Chancellorsville, Jackson sneaked his corps away through the forest, avoiding even the espionage of General Hook-

er's balloon observers. He made unseen camp well around the flank.

Clay Harned, starting awake that night on his couch of pine needles, saw the dark beard of Jackson above a tiny fire. Opposite him was a smaller beard, the silver gray beard of Robert E. Lee. The South's two paladins were discussing another of those desperately brilliant coups by which they might turn certain defeat into overwhelming victory. It would be another hazarding of all their forlorn hopes on a single chance to smash the bigger invader. That strange, capricious power, that gamblers call luck, had been backing them. Watching, Clay Harned felt, again, a point of burning heat over his belly where the marked bullet lay. What warning did it give him?

Next morning, Jackson hurled his columns entirely around Hooker's flank, to gain the rear unobserved. And in the afternoon, he fell upon and routed the bluecoats. Clay Harned, galloping with the staff, heard Jackson's one order of the day, repeated and repeated again:

"Press forward!"

And he saw the gesture of Jackson's hand, flourished as though he would hurl his thousands like a missile upon the enemy.

All the rest of that day, Jackson's corps harried the cut-up Federals through the spring woodlands. As the sun dropped down, the general and his staff rode to the forefront to reconnoiter.

"Cavalry!" yelled someone, and Clay Harned, trotting his horse almost at Jackson's elbow, saw a rifleman standing up from among bushes, his weapon to his shoulder. A Southern infantryman, he was deceived by Jackson's blue cloak.

"No! No!" Harned yelled.

He spurred his mount so that he covered Jackson's body with his own. The bullet was a throbbing lump of fierce heat against him that moment. And the man with the rifle, still not understanding, pressed trigger. From all around roared Confederate small-arms, in the hands of expert marksmen who thought that Jackson was an enemy patrol.

Wind shook Clay Harned in his saddle, and his startled horse plunged, wheeled and tore into the woods. He savaged it back under control and rode after General Jackson, who also struggled to quiet his terrified sorrel. The chief's bearded face had gone pale, but he spoke calmly:

"My arm is broken, I think. Will you help me down?"

HARNED dismounted and tried to steady Jackson as he drew foot from stirrup. But the general's eyes closed. He collapsed and sagged down into Harned's arms. As Harned eased him to earth, another rider leaped from his saddle. It was a Lieutenant Morrison of the staff.

"Let's carry him in our arms," he panted. "The Yankees aren't two hundred yards off. They're going to counter-attack!"

But Jackson had recovered. Pluckily he got to his feet.

"No," he said, weakly but definitely. "Help me, and I can walk."

Harned drew the general's unwounded arm across his shoulder. Morrison supported him from the other side. The three moved unsteadily toward a road among the trees to the rear. Harned heard Jackson grit his teeth in his beard. A Major Leigh waited for them at the roadside. He had procured a stretcher with two bearers.

"Lie down, General," he said, and Jackson obeyed.

At that moment, fire and explosions tore the evening air. The Union forces, roused by the confusion so close to them, had opened fire.

One of the stretcher men fell dead. The other ran wildly away. Major Leigh hurled curses at him, and Jackson called out clearly enough:

"No profanity, Major. You'd better lie down, too."

All threw themselves flat. The air above them was ripped with bullets. Jackson stirred on his grounded litter, and Harned, rising on his elbow, threw an arm across him.

"Lie still, sir," he begged. "It's worth your life to rise."

Then the fire veered from the road, and the officers bore Jackson rearward

again, leaving him in the hands of a surgeon. Harned remained at call until he heard an orderly say that Jackson's condition was not dangerous. Then he reported to the front.

General J. E. B. Stuart, the dashing chief of Lee's cavalry, took command of the corps next morning to finish what Jackson had begun. Harned rode all day at Stuart's side.

When the last Northern soldier had scurried across the Rappahannock, Stuart took time to rein in and address the aide who had kept close to him:

"You've stayed with me right well, Captain Harned. Point of fact, you are too good a rider to stay with the infantry. Why not transfer to my outfit?"

Harned shook his head.

"Can't, sir. I mustn't leave General Jackson."

Stuart's brown beard, that made him look like the old engraving of Captain John Smith, broadened in a smile.

"I see. Funny, how old Stone Jack holds the love of his men. Well, if you ever change your mind, get in touch with me."

And they parted. Harned could hear the young general singing:

"If you want to have a good time, jine the cavalry."

But on May 10, Lieutenant-General Stonewall Jackson died.

Harned, hearing this, fumbled for that bullet that twice had turned hot in moment of danger and tragedy, and was now corpse-cold again. Had General Jackson died in his stead? Was there anything to the strange claims of the witch's granddaughter? He asked for a leave of absence, and went back to the hills among which he had grown up. At a grove-sandwiched bend of Bush Creek, he knocked at a cabin door, and Jen Bate came to answer it. She seemed pleased, but not very surprised. He wondered if somehow she had expected him.

"Well," she said, "won't you come in, Mr. Harned?" Then she studied his spruce uniform, his shiny boots, his insignia of rank. "Or should I say Colonel Harned? Aren't you an officer?"

"A captain," he replied.

"Come in," she said again. "I'm alone. Grandmother Bate died this winter."

"No, I'll say my piece here," he murmured. "I came to talk about—this."

CLAY HARNED produced and held out the bullet with his name upon it. Jen Bate bent her head to look at it, then smiled up at him. He saw, for the first time, that her eyes were green.

"Well," she said, "what about it?"

Stiffly he recalled her words to her, the promise that death could not touch him.

"And has death touched you?" she asked. "No—always someone else, isn't that so?"

"That's just it!" he burst out at last. "Bee died, and now Jackson. Stonewall Jackson, Ma'am, the hope of the South! He died instead of me! What kind of dirty magic are you doing to make that happen?"

She smiled the more broadly, showing small, sharp teeth. The corners of her green eyes slanted, like an Oriental's.

"Easily explained, Captain Harned. Death chooses his mark. When his blow is deflected, it is not spent uselessly. Death isn't that way. There must be some target. A bullet comes for you, but it hasn't your name. It glances—and finds someone not protected. What would you have, then? I didn't say that I'd protect the whole Confederacy. I said I'd save you."

"But Jackson!"

"Ah," she said, "a very devout man, wasn't he? Prayed a lot? But his prayers didn't save him, not as my charm saved you."

Harned felt his young beard bristle.

"I don't believe you," he growled. "You're making a joke, and a devilish one. This bullet—take it back!" And he thrust it into her hand.

"No, wait," the girl bade him, and went into the cabin. He waited. When she returned, she offered him something that looked at first glance like a locket. "Put it around your neck," she bade him, and held it out.

It was a loop of fine silver chain, to which hung a little leather bag that was a finger snipped from an old

glove. In that bag was something roundish and solid.

"Wear it," Jen Bate was saying.

"Never take it off."

"That damned bullet? I told you I didn't believe . . ."

"Yes, you do believe. That's why you want to get rid of it. Prove your point, or mine. Wear it and fight through the war."

He bared his teeth at her, but he recognized the challenge, and accepted it. Snatching the pouch and chain he slipped the loop over his head and thrust it under his shirt.

"You will come back, and marry me," she said.

He tramped away without looking back. But behind him he heard the quiet laughter of Jen Bate.

When he rejoined the Army of Northern Virginia, he found a transfer and promotion awaiting him. He was now a major, commanding a battalion in Armistead's Brigade.

In June, Lee marched the army northward — across the Potomac, across Maryland, into Pennsylvania. The Union forces were drawn up, under Meade, at a little town between green ridges. Harned remembered the name of that town. It had been spoken two years ago to little Willie Thompson, by Witch Bate. It was Gettysburg.

CHAPTER III

The Valley of Death

THE sun was oppressively hot, hotter even than it had been two years ago that month, at Manassas. For forty-eight hours the Army of Northern Virginia had wrestled Meade's stubborn lines back and forth around Gettysburg, now thrusting like a rapier, now smashing like a bludgeon, rocking but not routing the defense.

At mid-afternoon of the third day General George Pickett saw Longstreet nod grimly. He saluted in reply. His great voice thundered orders. Three brigades of infantry rose

from where they lay in ranks. They formed as for a parade.

Out moved Brigadier-General Garnett in the center, riding behind Pickett, and followed by the mounted colonels and majors, spaced in front of their own commands. With him at the right, went Kemper's Brigade. Armistead, a little slow, gave the order for his men to advance at double-quick and catch up on the left. Ahead, skirmished an open line of scouts.

The battle smoke had drifted away to the left front, and the Virginians saw their objective—

Cemetery Hill. Once on that hill, with guns to follow, and the field would be dominated, the battle won.

The division came to a road. At Pickett's signaled command, each brigade wheeled to the left, keeping its units in line, but now drawing up as brigades in echelon. They moved forward smartly. Up ahead, the Yankees appeared to reel. Had the moment come, expected at Manassas, Richmond, Sharpsburg, Chancellorsville, when the North would have its bellyfull?

From every quarter of the defense, from Cemetery Hill and from the ridge to the right of the advancing troops, roared suddenly the full-throated chorus of the Union artillery—a great Valkyrian outpouring, more than a hundred cannon. The tense Union infantry chimed in with all their muskets. Men tumbled over, clumps of them at once, as sheaves tumble from a reaper. Those who remained on their feet leaned forward into the storm. Even the shrill keening yell of rebel defiance lost itself in the deafening racket of the volleys.

Young Major Harned was riding behind Colonel Aylett, Armistead's second-in-command. Aylett turned backward to say something. It must have been something incongruously funny, for he was smiling, but Harned could not hear. He spurred closer, and Aylett dipped sideways, sprawled under his horse's hoofs. Others were falling, in the companion brigades, and the draw was filling with smoke, as the Virginians began to return the fire of their enemies.

Garnett's close-order line, a little in advance, had come within a hundred yards of the ramparts even as its commander fell dying. The men paused for only a moment, and Kemper marched up to join them. Armistead, his own ranks cut and tunneled with Union shot, advanced in turn, jamming his brigade into the center.

Harned was close behind his brigadier, glancing to right and left for the support they must have. Nobody was visible to the smoke-fogged right, whence came such deadly fire. To the left, Pettigrew's troops had lagged back. But Pickett's Division had not the time or will to wait.

Its ranks began to thin again under the blaze of big shot and small, men dropping like ripe fruit from a shaken bough.

A SHELL bounded on the turf in front of Harned. It burst into a world of singeing fire, and suddenly he was on foot. His horse had become a scattered, bloody wreck around him. But Harned was not even shaken by the explosion.

He caught up his sword sheath in his left hand and trudged forward, his spurs jingling awkwardly. Just ahead went Armistead, also unhorsed, his sword lifted toward the stone wall where the Yankees held their first line. A whole congress of muskets spat at the two officers. No fire came from behind Harned—there were no men to fire. They had all been swept away, shot away.

He found himself whooping like an Indian, firing his revolver into a bearded face that became a sudden fountain of blood, hacking at a glaring sergeant with his saber. The rebel yell beat up to heaven as the survivors of the brigade scrambled over the wall, thrusting with bayonet and firing pointblank at their foes. The Yankees fell back warily to a second line of defense, a string of earthworks.

A color sergeant, of the Ninth Virginia Infantry, wedged the butt of his flagstaff between the stones of the captured wall. For a moment, the red battle banner of the South, crossed with starry blue, fluttered over the Union ramparts. Then, a volley of

musket balls literally ripped it from its fastenings.

The blue defenders had not quit. They rallied behind their earthworks, reinforced by hurrying companions. They fired at the men who had wrested their wall from them. Cannon belched into Armistead's all-but-obliterated command, tearing it apart with cannister.

Armistead lifted his hat on the point of his sword.

"Charge!" he yelled, in a voice that rivaled the artillery. He ran straight at the earthworks.

Harned kept pace with him. So did the last of his brigade—perhaps one-tenth of it still lived and fought. The wild rush burst over the works and through the packet defenders by sheer shock. Just beyond, drawn up under trees like ornaments in a park, stood silent cannon.

Concentrated shell and musketry fire had struck that battery. Only one Union artillerist still kept his feet. He was a young officer with a blond mustache. He held his wounded stomach with one hand, pulled a lanyard with the other, firing a last defiant salute in the face of the charge, before he collapsed. Armistead, with Harned a jump behind, sprang in among the guns. For a moment it was as though Cemetery Hill was taken, the battle of Gettysburg won.

But the second line was pierced, not stampeded. A Union private thrust a bayonet at Harned, missing crazily. There was a burning throb on Harned's chest, where hung the bullet that would keep him from harm. The man fired, his weapon's flash blackening Harned's face. And it was Armistead who fell dead.

Harned was cut off from his men. He glared at two set faces, each under a peaked blue cap. They flanked him, right and left. He did not move as two muskets lifted and covered his chest, his head. He stood up to them without word or quiver. The bullet in its bag scalded his flesh.

As with one wild voice of hate, the two weapons spoke. And still Clay Harned stood—alone.

The two men who had fired at him had fallen. Standing there dully,

Harned looked at them. Each had a bullet in his forehead, a round bullet to judge by the hole—a Minié ball, cast and issued to Union infantrymen. Those two bullets had been launched against the enemy, Harned. They had stricken down their friends.

He turned and strode away. He joined what few of his comrades were able to retreat from the charge that had failed to win the war for the South.

The retreat from Cemetery Ridge was the beginning of the retreat from Gettysburg. Exhausted, baffled for the first time in his career, Robert E. Lee fell back southward, and Meade dared not press him too closely. On the banks of the Potomac, Major Harned sat his new horse and watched the crossing—the famished cavalry, the staggering infantry, the wagons with the wounded. Another officer came close to him, a man on a magnificent dark bay, and spoke courteously.

"We meet again, sir. You were with Pickett in his charge, they tell me."

Harned faced around, and recognized the flaring beard and the plumed hat.

He saluted.

"I was, General Stuart."

"I also hear that you're a major without a battalion."

"Without much of anything. They killed and wounded three-quarters of us on the way up the hill."

"You were lucky to come off without a scratch."

Harned bit his lips, for the leather-pouched charm under his coat seemed to stir.

"But what I was going to say," continued Stuart, "is, that I'd still like to have you with me. Cavalry's run down—fewer of us, and not such good material. I can use an officer with a charmed life."

Again the bullet throbbed under Harned's coat, as if it nodded in response to the offer.

"I'll be honored, General Stuart," said Major Harned.

The transfer was effected, and Major Harned joined Hampton's Brigade. After that came the Bristow Campaign. Then, a fierce raiding over the Christmas season. The next spring

the bitter contest against Sheridan's superior numbers started.

On May 4, 1864, the Union broke through the gray line at Yellow Tavern. Stuart rode with eighty men to stem the tide, fired into it, and swept it back.

Harned, riding down an unhorsed Yankee cavalryman, saw the fellow's big revolver come up. A coal of fire danced on his chest, as it had so often before. The gun spoke, the fugitive dashed away, and Harned, unhurt, wheeled his horse to see what had happened.

Captain G. W. Dorsey, of the First Virginia Cavalry, had his hand on Stuart's bridle rein. Stuart clung to his saddle, his jacket front all dewed with crimson.

"Drive back the enemy," he gasped. "I'm mortally wounded—of no further use."

Dorsey and Harned got him to an ambulance. And later, Stuart died of the revolver bullet meant for Harned—died in his thirty-second year, amid his lieutenants, who wept like girls around his cot.

But in the meantime Major Clay Harned had ridden purposefully back, through the screen of Union cavalry, and well into the Union lines. There he surprised and surrendered to a bugler, a frightened boy who crouched under a bush until the noise of battle should die away. He stayed for a year in a prison camp, a vermin-infested huddle of wooden sheds and palings. After the surrenders of Lee and Johnston, he was permitted to go home.

CHAPTER IV

Ageless Evil

WHEN Clay Harned came to Jen Bate's cabin door, she asked: "Why did you do it?"

He was pallid and thin, but she did not look compassionate, only curious.

"You knew that you couldn't be hurt," she reminded. "Not by all the shot and shell in the Northern Army."

"I knew that," he admitted. "But other people would die. You told me they would, and they did. If I'd stayed fighting, my death would have missed me and come to others. Perhaps"—he stopped to swallow—"perhaps even to General Lee."

Jen Bate's green eyes smiled, and she shook her head.

"No. Lee hasn't many years left. He's old, with a gray beard and a broken heart. The men who died from those bullets aimed at you would be young."

"Jackson wasn't much more than forty," remembered Clay Harned. Jen Bate nodded.

"And Stuart was ten years younger. Bee and Armistead were in their prime." As she spoke, he wondered, but did not inquire, how Jen knew all these things. "Others, too. All told a full hundred unused years of life, don't you think? Years that will be mine."

"Yours?" he said, and scowled.

"You bring them to me. You're going to marry me. You'll say, 'With all my goods I thee endow. . . .'"

"Wait a minute," said Harned. "Is that why you want me for your husband? Filthy witchcraft? I don't understand such things except to hate them. As for marrying you, I don't think . . ."

"I offered you the bullet if you would promise," she broke in. "You took it. If any court of law could believe our story, it would find for me, I know. But we don't need any court of law. Come into the cabin, Clay Harned."

Suddenly he felt her eyes drawing him. Dreamily he walked through the door that she held open for him. Later, he did not remember what she said to him, or what he replied. He related, that she put his mind to sleep—hypnotism, or something of the sort. In any case, they were married the next day.

They did not live together. He went to Richmond, and studied law. This veteran major was only twenty-three at the end of the war, you will remember. He prospered as well as one might prosper in those hard reconstruction days. Became a state's at-

torney and, during the eighties, a judge.

In the first year of his judgeship, he got word of his wife.

A woman was brought to trial before him, a deformed creature charged with bringing a magic sickness to a neighbor's pigs. She mockingly admitted having done so, and Judge Harned delivered himself of a peculiar charge to the jury:

"There is vague evidence here to support the claim of supernatural power. I do not uphold nor deny such claim, but I do remind you that the defendant has virtually pleaded guilty. I find nothing in the statutes of Virginia to show that the laws involving witchcraft are repealed and nullified. In any case, this defendant had the will to destroy property, and the property has been destroyed. See what you make of it."

They found the woman guilty, and next day a visitor came to Judge Harned's chambers. She was Jen Bate Harned, his wife, and she had not aged a day in appearance since their separation. He knew why, and accused her:

"You're using those stolen lives that you took, through the charm I wore."

She smiled.

"The charm was to protect you!"

"And to destroy others."

SHE waved the accusation aside, and asked him to punish the pig-killer lightly.

"Not that she's my friend, or associate," she added. "Only that she's—well, a laborer in the same vineyard."

It was like a political boss pleading for some lowly pilferer who belongs to his party. Harned remembered the rumor of great organizational ties between all witches, something like the Ku Klux Klan's brotherhood a few years back. He shook his head.

"I shall sentence her very stiffly."

Jen's green eyes flashed hard lights, but she reverted to another subject.

"You don't like that bullet charm, Clay. Give it back to me."

Again he shook his head.

"I haven't forgotten that it will kill me. You won't get such a weapon, not

now that you hate me, that I'm of no further use to you." He paused a moment, and calculated on his fingers. "Something comes to mind. Once you said that you'd gained about a hundred years of extra life, Jen. Twenty of those years are up now, and you won't stay young much past the middle of the twentieth century."

She was glaring now. His cold irony had shaken her composure.

"You won't keep young, either," she replied.

"No, but I'll live, to be old—old. As long as I keep the bullet, I can't die. Some day, a long time off, I may go to your funeral, Jen. Don't expect flowers from me."

She left his office, in a white silent rage. That night someone entered his hotel apartment and ransacked it, but did not find the bullet. Clay Harned had hung it around his neck again.

He was a judge for full thirty years, and grew gray and thin, but not weak. In his withered body still crouched the vigor of his soldier days. When the European War broke out, he prayed that America would keep peace. When America declared war, he watched with pitying eyes the muster of young Virginians, the grandsons of his old comrades. They were clad in khaki instead of gray, marched under the Stars and Stripes instead of the Stars and Bars. It was in October, of 1917, when he, leaving court and waiting for a street car, was suddenly confronted on the pavement by Jen.

She was young, lovely, sinister. The sort of woman that a soldier would turn and look at.

"Hello, Clay," she said softly. "Do you still hate me?"

"I despise you, Jen," he answered levelly. "Let's see, how much of your time is there left to run. Until about 1965, eh? Say about fifty years of stolen youth? Not long to look forward to."

It stung her, and she snapped:

"I'll have more life and youth than that. There's another war, isn't there—another chance to garner lives?"

His street car had stopped, and he bowed courteously to her and boarded

it. But he had not ridden a block before the force and sense of her words struck him—

"Another war, another chance to garner lives."

But how could she, without the bullet he held from her? With another bullet, another unsuspecting fighting man to wear it for her?

He got off the car, went to a garage and rented an automobile. He could not drive very well, but he threaded the Richmond traffic, struck a country road, and came to a place he had not seen for years. It was the bend of Bush Creek, still closed in by trees, and there stood the cabin of Jen Bate.

He left his car a good distance away, came cautiously to the cabin.

THERE returned to his gaunt, aged body some of the wise stealth he had practised in the days when he scouted ahead of the Stonewall Brigade, or ambushed, with a chosen troop of Stuart's horse, a wagon train laden with Federal supplies.

He turned the knob without making the lock snick. He pushed open the door without letting the hinges grate. Now he could hear Jen Harned talking, in a voice both rapt and insistent, in the same tone which she had once used when speaking to him beside a forgotten campfire.

He slid through the half open door, and closed it behind him.

Only once before he had been in that room, and he could not well remember what it was like. Now he saw a partition of split planks, a puncheon floor, an open fire against the evening chill. On a settee lounged Jen, her white, red and black beauty as blazing as it had ever been.

Her fringed lids lay calculatingly low over her slant green eyes, as she watched her companion. He was a young man with stiff-cropped hair, the color of Stonewall Jackson's old sorrel horse.

The young man wore a khaki uniform, with shiny boots and a belt that sprouted a strap up over his right collar bone. On each of his square shoulders glinted a little oblong of gold. He was a second lieutenant, one of many

half-trained to lead America's platoons into perilous places.

It came to old Clay Harned that this youngster was not much older than he himself had been in April of 1861, before he knew gunfire or the enchantment of Jen Bate, the granddaughter of the witch. And the lieutenant was watching Jen, as movelessly intent as a bird under the charm-laden eyes of a snake.

"For every soldier," droned Jen hypnotically, "there is a bullet with his name on it—a bullet that can and will kill him. But suppose your bullet was never fired at you? Suppose I gave it to you to keep?"

"I suppose," the lieutenant replied, in a hoarse, boyish voice, "that I'd be safe."

"What would you give me for it?" insisted Jen. "Because I have it here. Look!"

She held out her palm. There was a little cylinder of metal, smaller than the Minié ball that she had given Clay fifty-six years ago, and brighter, steel-jacketed. It must have been a German Mauser ball. The lieutenant was bending close to see. He was reading aloud, from writing that must be across that pointed nose:

"Joel Simmons. Why—why, that's my name!"

"Of course. Now you believe my magic. And you'll keep the bullet safe, come home alive, and marry me. . . ."

Clay Harned cleared his throat loudly, making the pair on the settee jump. When he spoke to them, he sounded quite cheerful.

"Just a moment, please, Lieutenant. Don't make any rash pledges to this lady. You see, she's already married. I'm her husband, Judge Harned."

Both started up from where they sat. Lieutenant Joel Simmons, very much the romantic protector, stepped in front of Jen.

"You're her husband?" he repeated, and Harned could see that he believed it.

"Lieutenant," said Harned, "you must be badly needed by your men. I'm sorry to tell you good-day."

The young man drew himself up sturdily.

"Sir, I'll be as honest as you seem to be. I'm sorry, but I love your wife. I'm going to marry her."

"No, you aren't," said Harned, and made a quick leaping stride across the room.

One sinewy old hand caught Jen's wrist and jerked her into the open, then spun her into a corner. Harned stood between her and her lieutenant.

"Better run along, son," he warned. "You'll wish you had."

AS HE spoke, heat flared against the middle of his chest, under the hanging bullet—heat like that of a burning-glass concentrating the sun's rays. He did not have to guess what Lieutenant Simmons was doing with a hand at his hip.

"Wait," gulped the lieutenant manfully, and lugged into view a bright new service pistol. Harned admired it greatly.

"Oh," he grinned at the lad, "it's gunplay, is it?"

"I'll leave, sir, and Jen will leave with me."

"But if I won't let her?" suggested Harned.

He had a sudden inspiration, that warmed his heart to match the bullet above it.

"Then I'll . . ."

"Be careful, Joel!" cried Jen, in a voice tightened by deadly fear. "Don't shoot!"

"Not unless I have to, darling," he replied.

The gun stared at old Clay Harned, and the lieutenant addressed him, still respectfully:

"Well, sir, can't we talk this out? If you try to be violent, I'll have to shoot. And Jen won't tell the authorities on me."

"No," smiled Harned, "Jen won't tell on you."

He made another leap at Simmons. The gun's muzzle dug hard into his belly, spat fire—twice. Then the old man had seized the young one's wrist. With a quick twist and jerk he possessed himself of the weapon. His other hand shoved Simmons violently against the planks of the wall. Simmons did not fight back, but stared roundly at him.

"But I shot you, sir, through the . . ."

"No harm to me," Harned assured him. "But look at Jen, Lieutenant Simmons."

Simmons gazed past him, wailed like a child cut with a switch, and ran across the room. He scooped up the limp, fallen thing that had been Jen Bate Harned. Then, whimpering, he dropped the body, for he recognized it no more.

White hair, harsh, wrinkle-crossed face, a visage of ageless evil. Harned had been right, that evening long ago. Jen Bate, grown old, looked like her grandmother, the witch. He took the lieutenant by the shoulder and made him stand up.

"Clear out," he said. "Nobody knows either of us came here. She was a bad woman, son, and you don't need her bullet in this war."

He bent and took the bullet from the limp claw that had been Jen's slender white hand. He threw it into the heart of the fire.

"Get out, I say."

Lieutenant Simmons got. Harned departed in another direction. He got into his rented car and returned to Richmond. Several days later he read in the paper that an unidentified old woman had been found shot in a suburban cabin, from which had vanished one Jen Harned, a young woman of mysterious ways. The police looked for Jen Harned, but never found her. The aged corpse was buried in the potter's field, and the incident never came home to the quiet old judge who lived by himself and dealt out honest law.

That was twelve years ago. Harned felt more quiet and easy, than he had

felt since boyhood, but there was no reason he could think of for living on, alone and tired. He retired from the bench, and went to live in a home for Confederate veterans in the southern part of Virginia.

Last July Fourth he came to Richmond, and the day after that, he happened to pass an old second-hand shop in which a customer was buying a Springfield musket, picked up long ago on the battlefield at Cold Harbor. The customer was myself.

Harned came in to look at the gun, and introduced himself. He was delighted to hear that my great-grandfather was a colonel in the Stonewall Brigade, and that I had been named for General Wade Hampton, under whom he had served in Stuart's Cavalry.

We had lunch together, and later drove out into the country. Once he asked me to stop my car, not far from the edge of town. Entering a hardware store, he bought some fine gunpowder and a few percussion caps.

When we stopped and lounged on the banks of Bush Creek, he carefully loaded the Springfield I had bought. Sitting on the running-board, with the long barrel across his thin old knees, he told me the story which I have set down here. When he had finished, he showed me the bullet with his name on it.

"I think that lump of lead has waited long enough for a chance to do its duty," he said as I handed it back to him.

Before I could stop him, he dropped that bullet into his gun, put the muzzle into his mouth, and, with the toe of his boot, kicked back the trigger.

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*So Strange Are the Ways of the Supernatural That Even
the Bark of a Dog May Grow Into a Thing
of Ultimate Horror!*

By JOHN CLEMONS

Author of "City of Dreadful Night," "Revolt of the Soul," etc.

"I HAVE had to lie to him, Dr. Barton," Frank Forrest said. "I have had to tell him you are the best friend I have in the world—have been ever since we were in college together. I beg you to

carry out this impression when you meet him. You must call me 'Frank,' and I shall have to call you simply 'Will.' Bear in mind, Doctor, for the love of God, that I have been almost a whole year getting him to consent

*His face
began to
look
like a
canine's*



to assistance from medical science. I fear it is too late already."

"Do I understand you to say, Mr. Forrest—er—Frank—that your brother has for nearly a year been under the singular delusion he is being haunted by the ghost of a dog?" the famous psychiatrist asked.

There was a world of bitterness in Forrest's short laugh.

"It is no delusion, Doctor. And I should be actually pleased if it were only the ghost of a dog. That would make the case comparatively simple. No, it goes deeper than that. My brother is being haunted by the *bark* of a dog. To that I can testify with absolute assurance. For—I have heard it!" Forrest hesitated, then spoke abruptly. "I should like to tell you the story in its entirety, so you may be better able to judge."

"By all means. It is essential that you do."

The psychiatrist settled back to listen to a story that was phenomenal even in his wide knowledge of the extraordinary quirks that come to the human brain.

* * * * *

THE story goes back a year, to a bitter cold day in January. My brother was alone, in his hunting lodge in the Adirondacks. He had been snowed in for days.

He was beginning to weary of his own company, but had become resigned to the bleak prospect of many more days of loneliness for it was howling a blizzard outdoors. It was only early afternoon, but already the light was fading fast, presaging the long winter night. He was clearing away the things after a late luncheon when he heard a rap on the door.

Naturally, he was startled. No one, nothing, could live long in that raging blizzard, and he was miles away from the nearest habitation. It was not possible to survive a trek to the nearest neighbor in any direction. The caller, would have had to drop out of the bleak skies to be alive at all! It must be a trick of the moaning, bitter wind, he thought. But the sharp rap came again, it raised staccato echoes inside the

lodge above the wail of the wind. Mind you this was a sharp rapping of *knuckles*, followed by the loud pounding of a *fist*. It was a sound no animal could make. There was no mistaking it this time.

My brother ran to the door and unbolted the heavy cross-piece. He didn't have to open the door—the wind fairly threw it in his face. He braced himself against the sweeping cold, looked around in the gathering gloom, but could see nothing. Puzzled, he was about to force the door to again, when he heard a faint whimpering sound at his feet.

He looked down. There was a dog, almost smothered in the banked snow on the porch. It was so far gone it could not even crawl. A good-sized beast it was, of some mongrel breed, but most resembling a police dog. Its coat was shaggy, and it was emaciated from hunger and privation. With a cry of pity, my brother stopped to pick it up. Then he saw footprints in the snow.

"So your master's about, eh?" he said to the suffering animal. "Well, we'll soon have him by the fire."

He put the dog on a rug, close to the fire, belted himself against the cold, lit a lantern, and went out to look for the dog's master.

A curious thing at once developed. The tracks of the man were fresh, and plain even in the uncertain light. But they led only one way—toward the house. My brother decided that the exhausted man, having received no answer from the front of the house, had gone around to the back, and collapsed there.

But even before my brother finally fought his way to the back of the house, having to battle his way through drifts sometimes hip-high, he realized that no one could go through that without leaving a plain trail.

The winter night was down in earnest now, but my brother did not give up the search. He made his way back to the front of the house. The footprints were all but obliterated by now, but still made a plain straight trail to the house—not away from it or around it. They simply stopped by the door. Another curi-

ous thing my brother noted was that there were no dog tracks along with the human footprints, evidence to him that the man had been carrying his dog.

My brother made fresh efforts to find the lost man, calling against the strong wind as he searched in a fan-like sweep, waving his lantern and stumbling into deep drifts. After an hour or two he was beginning to be in considerable danger himself. So, forced to the conclusion that the unfortunate wayfarer had been buried in a deep drift, he mournfully made his way back to the lodge.

When he got back into the lodge the dog was sleeping its exhaustion away. My brother took off his things and thawed out by the fire, musing on the hard luck of the lost man, who had lost his grip when he was within inches of safety.

His heart went out to the sleeping dog. It was in a pitiful condition. Each gently rising rib could be counted. Its coat was ragged, its limbs mere pipe-stems. It would not have fared better than its master if there had been a minute's more delay in opening the door.

My brother reproached himself for not having answered the summons sooner—as if it was his fault that the fellow outside hadn't waited a moment longer. Even the dog had shown better sense. Though perhaps both man and dog had been too far gone to know what they were doing. He was of course thankful that he had at least managed to save the dog.

Dogs are the nearest thing to human companionship, most men will agree. My brother began to be glad for the company. He warmed some milk, liberally sprinkled crushed crackers into it, and stretched out in a big chair till the dog should wake and be fed. Except for short cat-naps, he watched over it the whole night long. No doctor was ever more anxious about a human patient. He felt more than passing responsibility toward the unfortunate animal: its owner was doubtless dead in the treacherous white void outdoors. Moreover it was in desperate straits and a fugitive from the storm.

It woke with the sad gray dawn, looked around wanly—a startled sort of look, as if it had not expected to wake. It was still too weak to stand. My brother had to hold its head up so it could eat the milk and crackers. It ate so ravenously, as if it had been starved a long time, that for the next half hour my brother was busy feeding it. Its appetite and capacity were astonishing, but once satisfied, the dog promptly stretched out and went back to sleep.

MY BROTHER laughed. "You're man-size all right," he said. "We'll get along."

They got along—and that's the story. They got along *too* well.

The dog slept the day through, and most of the night. When my brother got up on the following dawn, the dog was already awake, lying quietly by the dying fire. It seemed practically recovered, though still a bit wobbly in the legs.

My brother got a really good look at it for the first time, and burst out laughing. The dog had a drooping left eyelid. If you have ever seen a dog with a drooping eyelid, you may know that at first it's comical, but soon it becomes annoying, and later on it can be positively terrifying, if you are alone in the house with it long. That drooping left eyelid gave to that canine countenance almost a human appearance. Not at first, of course, for at first it was merely comical.

My brother roughed the dog up but it refused to play. It did not growl or snap at him, but declined to respond to his friendly advances. It was aloof, retaining something of a perpetually startled expression, as if surprised that it had found kindness in a stranger, and electing to reserve decision. But the way it looked, with that comical, appraising expression—like a village constable looking the city fellers over through his glasses—was too much for my brother.

"You look like One-Eyed Pete the Sailor, you old pirate," he told the dog. "I think I'll call you 'Pete.'"

He talked to the animal, as men will when they are alone with a dog.

"Look here, Pete," he said, "I know you're a one-man dog, and that you're loyal to your master. But your master is dead, Pete. You'll never see him again. I wish I could make you understand that, Pete. I wish I could talk dog language to you. He's just not coming back any more, Pete. I know it's sad, old man, but I'll try and take his place in that faithful heart of yours."

Well, the dog pricked up its ears just as if it understood. It gave a few guttural barks that might have been canine signs of appreciation, accord, and contractual compact. At any rate, from that time on the dog began to trust my brother. Firm friendship quickly followed trust, of course. By the end of the week they were pals.

IT WAS ten days before they could venture outdoors with reasonable safety and comfort. The first thing my brother did was to trek to the village and explain to the sheriff what had happened. There was no tag or identifying collar on the dog so it was not possible to at once establish the dead man's identity.

It did not take long to raise a posse among the friendly rustics, to dig for the lost man. They dug till the bright melting sun went down. They dug in every likely drift and pile. They cleared the surface in a wide circle all around the house, tested drifts far away on the odd chance that the man might have managed to grope that far in the darkness. But when the nipping night came they had found nothing; not a trace of a lost human.

All agreed that since no alarm had been given, the man must have been a stranger in the immediate vicinity.

The hunting season was over, so on the following day my brother took the dog and returned to his home in Bronxville. He had developed a genuine affection for the serio-comic animal with the drooping left eyelid, and the dog showed that my brother had won him completely. He acted as though he had never known another master.

I do not mean by this that the dog

ever fawned or frolicked. He still retained a rather gravely dignified demeanor, but my brother found this attitude amusing. It was like having a friend instead of a dog in the house. And unlike many friends, Pete was never a bore. He knew his proper place and kept it. He must have been of unusual intelligence for he learned to interpret every word of his new master; an order, to him, was a duty to be performed with pleasure.

My brother is a bachelor. Before the advent of the abnormal affliction of which I earlier told you, and which this story is leading up to, an elderly lady, a Mrs. Waller, used to come each morning to make his breakfast. She would remain in the house all day, to clean and take care of things, while he went to his business in the city. Upon his return in the evening she had his dinner ready, and after serving it she went home.

Mrs. Waller is a big, motherly woman, with a quip and a ready smile for everyone. She accepted the dog and its care as an agreeable diversion. She laughed with my brother at the comical expression the dog unconsciously achieved with that silly droop to the eyelid. But, whereas the animal had never showed the least sign of resentment when my brother good-humoredly laughed at it, it growled ominously at Mrs. Waller. The dog's displeasure never took a serious turn. It was as if he was just serving notice that special license was reserved for his master.

That woman was good to the dog, gave it the run of the house. It took to following her around as she went about her duties and she rather liked that; it was company and, if need be, protection. Any woman alone in a house becomes nervous at times.

Mrs. Waller eventually became nervous also, but in a way she least expected. Being alone, she, too, got into the habit of talking to the dog. She discussed with it all manner of things, and the dog would pay her no attention until she began to discuss my brother's dinner with him.

"I think baby lamb chops would

please him tonight, Peter my boy," she would say. "Or do you prefer a juicy roast?"

And the dog would bark his approval or growl in displeasure, as the case might be.

SHE thought little of this in the beginning, attaching no special significance to his apparent understanding. It was forcibly brought home to her, however, on one occasion when, having casually mentioned chops to the dog and received his bark of approval, she changed her mind and served steak. The dog growled his resentment all the next day.

It frightened the poor woman half out of her wits. For she was forced to suspect that the dog *did* understand. Once frightened, she could no longer talk freely to him, which seemed to pique the dog even more. He stopped growling, but Mrs. Waller swore Pete made faces at her as he followed her around from room to room.

It terrified Mrs. Waller. And noting this, the dog obviously took evil delight in torturing her in this manner. Can you imagine that whiskery canine face with the drooping left eyelid that somehow humanized it—can you imagine it glaring at you one moment, laughing at you the next, leering at you—distorting its ugly animal face into all manner of repulsive, frightful twists?

Such conduct is conceivable in a human being. But in an animal! Mrs. Waller tried to take it outside, but it wouldn't go. On the following day, without telling my brother her real reason, for fear of being laughed at, but simply complaining that the dog was making it difficult for her to keep the house clean, Mrs. Waller got my brother to take the dog outdoors before he left for business.

She did not allow the dog an opportunity of coming inside, and when indeed, my brother was around it continued to behave normally. Mrs. Waller began to believe she had imagined the whole thing, but she did not relent. The dog was again

taken outdoors by my brother the next morning.

Toward mid-afternoon Mrs. Waller began to feel uncomfortable as if someone was watching her from behind. Fearing an intruder had entered she started to the back door to let the dog in. But on passing a mirror, she saw it was the dog that was behind her. How he had got in she didn't know, but simply that he was there was sufficient to frighten her out of her wits. But he made no move to harm her; he merely followed her around as before—making fearful faces at her whenever she dared look.

This time she knew she was not imagining anything. It was too much for her. She managed to drag herself through the day, but when my brother returned that night, she quit.

Nor could he induce her to stay by a promise of more money. She confesses now that she might have told him the trouble, except that the dog was watching her closely, with a calculating look in that drooping left eye of his. It sent shivers up and down her spine. She couldn't get out of the house fast enough.

A week or two later, there was a kidnap scare in town. A little girl had become separated from some other children on the way from school and did not return home. My brother took a day off from business, and with other neighbors, and his dog, beat the brush in outlying districts, under the direction of police. Nothing resulted from this search, and subsequent searches proved just as useless. The police apprehended suspects, of course, but all were eventually released on insufficient evidence. The child seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth.

Then on an early March Sunday, a wet, dreary day, when my brother was preparing for the rabbit season by cleaning his guns, the telephone rang, informing him that another child had disappeared; this time on the way home from Sunday school. There seemed no doubt now that some depraved scoundrel was at work.

In no time a posse was formed.

My brother came with a .30-30 rifle. He meant business. He did not even wait to find his dog, which was not about at the moment.

The men met at the church, each armed, with tempers at top heat. With the memory of the other vanished child still fresh in their minds, they were grim and determined. There was no question that if the culprit was sighted the law was going to be cheated of its prize.

EACH man was assigned his place by the guiding police, and they were off. Some of the men had brought their dogs, and the deep baying of the excited animals was alone enough to scare daylight out of the quarry, if anywhere around.

For an hour they beat around in the rain, not always within hailing distance of one another. My brother was following some plain tracks in the muddy soil that looked suspicious to him. Obviously they were fresh tracks or the rain would have soaked them up. He hung onto the trail, becoming separated from the rest.

As the tracks became fresher my brother grew excited. The homes in this district, as you know, have generous spaces all around them, a single home, with its grounds, sometimes occupying several acres. The trail led across one of these wide open spaces, making it easy to follow. It led at last across an open field bordered by a thin fringe of woods, and for the first time my brother had a clear view ahead of him. Almost to the woods, was a sprinting man, who had something in his arms.

The police had cautioned the men about careless shooting, warning them that they might be shooting at one of their own number. At that distance my brother could not recognize the runner, especially in the pall of the murky rain. The thing the fellow was carrying might be a makeshift weapon. Many such were carried by the man-hunters. So instead of at once bringing the running man down, my brother hailed him.

On hearing that, the runner put

on an amazing burst of speed. My brother felt certain then he had tracked down the criminal. He fired, just as the man reached the woods. He saw the fellow stumble, but he recovered almost instantly and disappeared in the black fringe of woods as if swallowed by the earth. Firing again to call the others, my brother dashed for the spot where the man had disappeared. When he arrived at the spot he heard a mad scuffling in the underbrush, out of sight behind the trees, and blindly plunged in—only to find he had followed the echo instead of the culprit, because as sometimes happens in wooded places, his ears had played tricks on him.

However, he is an experienced hunter, and when a moment later he heard the ferocious growls of a fighting dog coming from the opposite direction, he plunged back to the outer fringe of trees. A strange sight met his gaze. Staggering out of the woods, wet, bedraggled, smeared with mud, was his own dog, Pete. And he was dragging the unconscious missing child by the coat.

My brother reached the pair in a bound and relieved the struggling dog of its human burden. Pete was so thoroughly exhausted, he dropped in the mud and lay panting.

In his great surprise and excitement, my brother forgot the escaping kidnaper. But the next minute the others were arriving on the scene, and they at once organized a concentrated search. But the fleeing criminal was not apprehended.

Well, you may be sure my brother's dog was a hero in the community! The motion was made and carried right there to have a medal struck off for him. The dog was too proud to accept attention for its hurts, and after repeated attempts had been repulsed by the animal, my brother requested that Pete be left alone. That was a real dog, he told them. A few wounds were nothing in his life. Hell, hadn't he survived a blizzard in which humans had died!

The next day, my brother and his dog left to take in the rabbit season

up North. On the morning after their arrival my brother took the dog and went out to hunt. They spied fair game in a short while, in the chill, bare fields. My brother raised his gun to fire, but he did not pull the trigger. His dog was tearing madly after the fleeing rabbit and to shoot now was to take a chance on hitting the dog.

A rabbit as of course you know, is one of the fleetest of small game. But that dog overhauled the rabbit in as much time as it takes to tell about it. He leaped on the poor creature and crushed its neck with one crunch of his powerful jaws. And he did not stop there. He mangled and mauled it for what seemed like the sheer joy of spilling blood. When my brother came puffing to the spot the rabbit was only a pulpy mess.

Tough and seasoned hunter though he is, my brother was horrified. He raised his hand to wallop the brute, but thought better of it. Instead, he packed him off home, and after locking him in the house, went back to the hunt alone.

He bagged his limit for the day and returned to the house. He found the dog in a state of purest contrition and sorrow. If ever an animal talked, that dog talked then—with eyes and downcast head and low moaning bleat. My brother roughed Pete up and forgave him. And the way the dog frisked around—an unusual thing—proved to my brother how highly the animal esteemed him. No one else had ever been able to get even a look of recognition. But Pete was crazy about my brother, to the very end.

To prove to himself that the dog realized he had acted badly and would behave in future hunts, my brother left his dead rabbits within easy reach. They could have been a mile in the sky for all the difference it made to Pete. He didn't even come near them.

My brother was awakened during the night by a sound that he could not at once place. He looked out of the window. A light snow was falling. It bathed the trees and

shrubs and ground with furtive fingers, like the pale phantasmal encounter of a ghost with a seraph. But he had a sudden jar when he caught sight of a gamboling figure in the snow—and a greater one when he saw that the dancing thing was his dog, leaping about like a frisky colt—perhaps, running down rabbits in the big clearing.

He got one and tore it to shreds before my brother's horrified eyes. He ripped and mangled it and chewed and tore as much as he had done to that other unfortunate animal in the morning. It was the little delighted yips he was unconsciously making that had awakened my brother. Never in his life had my brother witnessed, or even heard of such an exhibition of spiteful, wild and extravagant cruelty.

AND after ripping a rabbit to pieces, the canny dog would hide until another victim wandered into the clearing, a plain victim in the wan light of the crystal moon.

My brother's first impulse was to yell to the dog to come in the house. On the point of raising the window however, a sort of sixth sense stayed his hand. For suddenly many things that had before been lightly dismissed, or ignored altogether, took on a strange significance. Things hidden in forgotten and neglected cubicles of his brain now popped out with robust force. Weird stories of necromancy, strange tales heard in childhood and long since laid in latent slumber, crashed through the thin walls of memory.

At no time was my brother ever afraid of the dog. Had he feared it his life story would have come to an end months ago. Horror, yes. He felt horror and disgust and was sick and sorry, too, for he realized now how much he had loved that animal.

But he was master and he knew it; and the dog knew it too. My brother is master still. How long he will so continue—that is the story. For when the time comes that that dog shall so forcefully assert its mastery as to assume command of the man, in that moment will come my brother's com-

plete and utter destruction. They're fighting it out now.

Yes, I know I said that the dog is dead now and that my brother is haunted by its bark. I'll come to that in a moment and you'll see what I mean. I must finish telling of that night, and the dog's blood orgy under the crystal moon.

So far as sleep was concerned, my brother was through for the night, of course. He lay in bed, trying to shut his ears to the happy yips of the hunting-dog, and the growls of pleasure he gave while at his gruesome work. In my brother's chaotic thoughts, the mystic, the weird, the dead, and the eternally damned were all mingled. He recalled how he had first come upon the dog. He remembered only too well that a single pair of tracks—a man's tracks—had led to the lodge that fateful stormy afternoon.

Yet he had found only a dog—and there had been no dog tracks. Nor was a human body ever found even when the snow had melted away. Then there was the singular rescue the dog had achieved, only a few days before, when the child had disappeared on the way home from Sunday school. Then, too, he had followed the tracks of a man, but it was the dog that had appeared with the child. Nor had a man been apprehended.

THERE were other things too, but these two thoughts constituted mighty twin pinnacles, impossible to hurdle lightly in the strange light of present developments. Still, all the evidence was purely circumstantial: it was by no means conclusive. And to a sane man he would probably be thought insane if he should advance the theory, based on ancient tales of necromancy, that it was possible for the bodies and souls of a dead man and a live dog to be interchangeable. It would be laughed at as a witch's tale.

But as for my brother—he was not so sure. He knew a way to make sure, though; a way that would leave no doubt in his own mind at least. He had shot the running man, the kid-

naper, that Sunday. He was sure of this for he was an expert shot, an experienced hunter; and besides the man had stumbled. When the dog had emerged with the rescue, unconscious child in its teeth, the animal had been bleeding from more than one wound. It had naturally been supposed that the wounds had been inflicted by the kidnaper he had fought in the woods, and by his battle in the leafless wintry underbrush.

But suppose now—suppose now, there was a bullet wound too?

You probably recall now that the dog reacted unfavorably to every attempt at treating its hurts; that he wouldn't even let my brother examine him. My brother thought of that now. In the morning when he got up, the dog yawned and stretched by the fire as if he had been soundly sleeping the whole night long. My brother talked with Pete as he had always done. He did not often stroke it for he knew the dog did not like to be petted, but it did not mind being roughed up once in a while.

So after breakfast he played with Pete, and such a game you never saw. My brother was trying to find out if there was a bullet scar on the dog. But the dog caught on with peculiar intelligence; you might say with the same peculiar brand of intelligence it had exhibited all along. So what started as a game, soon progressed to a fencing match—fencing with wits and with hands and paws. It ended in a fight.

By Heaven, my brother proved he was master then! He beat the dog until it submitted to inspection, and showed proper and decent respect for his master. My brother found a bullet scar in the shoulder; a nick, no more—just enough to make a man stumble if he were running.

Then and there my brother's hunting season was over. He gave the dog every benefit of the doubt. He decided the evidence was still insufficient to convict, considering the monstrous nature of the charge. So he packed up and went home.

He chained the dog to a post in the yard from where it had a clear view

of a level field, part of which constituted the back yard in this town of generous spaces. My brother went to the shed and returned with a long handled garden spade. He set it down, and then he did a strange thing. He went in the house and got a .30-30 rifle. A bullet from this will kill a buck.

There was mute appeal in the dog's eyes. Something like terror shone in them when my brother began to dig. But the animal made no sound; merely waited for the next strange move the man might make. It seems reasonable to suspect that such an unusually clever animal knew what it was all about.

No, my brother was not digging a grave before killing him with the rifle. He was simply looking for further proof of the animal's enormous guilt—or else for complete exoneration. Like most dogs, Pete was a confirmed digger. But he had confined this canine pastime to the far edges beyond the back yard, skirting, but not infringing on his master's land. And now the master was going to find out if there was something more to the dog's digging than mere canine instinct. So he dug in every likely place. Wherever the surface soil had been scarred by previous digging, my brother dug again.

AND the dog watched, with an almost human expression of fear. Or perhaps it was that silly drooping eyelid that made my brother think so. He dug for an hour and found nothing more formidable than bones from long defunct chops of the lamb or the porker. It seemed to him that the dog was beginning to lose that look of fearful expectancy—and that spurred my brother on.

But this time he used strategy. He did not bluntly dig into a likely place and give full attention to his labor. As he worked he slyly watched the dog—and before long he was certain that Pete occasionally glanced for a moment at a spot that was not beyond the yard, but right in it. He stopped digging and approached that spot. The dog at once became tense, and very, very frightened. There was,

he says, no other interpretation for the animal's change of expression.

My brother knelt to examine the spot closely. It had been dug up and smoothed over afterwards—but not by a dog. That work had been done by human hands, guided by human intelligence. There was a chance the gardener had made the mark during the spring or summer, and it was showing up now because the ground was bare. But with the first shovelfull he turned, my brother had a presentiment of evil. The dog, watching, looked like a bewhiskered old man who had just heard the judge pronounce the death sentence: In that tense moment it looked like a sentient human being, thick coarse hair and all.

Well—that little child, the daughter of my brother's neighbor, who disappeared on the way home from school, you remember. My—my brother dug up the little body, or what remained of it, out of his own back yard. He easily identified the child by some remnants of clothes that still clung to the mutilated little frame.

I tell you that dog was frantic then! It made sobbing, barking noises it its throat. It cried! And I mean it shed tears! It cried like a human being, and all but begged for forgiveness and mercy. It must have valued the love of my brother very highly indeed, because it could have—you must not doubt this, you must believe me—it *could* have changed, and escaped.

Instead, it moaned and it wailed and it wept; but it didn't try to get away. Was the animal trying to make the man *understand*? How can one tell? Pete loved my brother, that is certain; he conceded him to be master. It made no attempt to harm him. It looked forlorn and pitiful and woebegone and penitent. But my brother had already learned much from the rabbit experience. The beast apparently could not help itself!

My brother shot the dog on the spot, trundled away the mess made by the heavy .30-30 in a wheelbarrow and buried it in a bit of a clearing in the woods. He said a prayer for the

repose of the soul, as one would if the deceased were human.

He was expecting some curious repercussion? But who wouldn't? He lay awake nights worrying about it. But when nothing happened by the end of the month, he began to feel better. Singularly, it was not until he stopped worrying that trouble did arrive.

It made itself manifest by the bark of a dog—Pete's bark, of course. In no other way did my brother know he was haunted. He could see nothing, either at night or in daylight. He could feel nothing. His sleep was good.

Oh, Pete was polite about it, you may be sure. My brother was still the master. It's just that the dog loved him so much that he refused to remain parted from him.

To one who has not experienced it as my brother has, it might be surprising to know how annoying, how vexatious and bothersome can be the simple bark of a dog. More especially when you cannot see the brute. It's persecution!

Take, for example, the time my brother was entertaining an out-of-town buyer at a famous night club. In the midst of a serious discussion, when a word the right way meant an order—the dog began to bark. The band was playing, people were laughing and talking, but they heard the barking about all that.

"The acoustics are terrible here," my brother said to his business acquaintance.

THEY went to another place. The acoustics were better. So good that everyone turned to look at my brother when the dog began to bark. The management came and threw him out for disturbing the peace, for it sounded as if he were doing the barking himself. There went an order, and the prospect of future orders as well.

There were certain similar incidents by the score. Distressing. My brother lost custom, and began to lose weight also. In two months he turned his business over to a manager in the hope of salvaging something,

and remained at home. And then the trouble began in deep earnest. The dog tried to get inside of him!

It may be unbelievable to you, but I know what I am talking about. That dead dog tried to gain control of my brother's body, for the purpose, no doubt, of continuing its earthly depredations where it had left off. It needed *someone*—some corporeal representation. And it loved him.

My brother fought it off by yelling at it whenever he felt a strange twinge of the limbs. He guessed what was happening, luckily for him, when, during one of the curious nervous storms that now oppressed him he chanced to look in a mirror. He noted a singular droop to the left eyelid, and an odd, pointed look about his face.

He began to fight then. He was still the master and he frightened the dog away. Rather, he *ordered* it away, since it was not a thing to be easily frightened.

This kept up, on and off, for about a month, but my brother felt himself weakening. He began to be afraid that it would get him in his sleep. He had no one to confide in, so he sent for me. He had been suffering for about four months then. It was five months after the death of the dog.

In the beginning I was skeptical, just as you are now. But I have heard the dog bark on innumerable occasions. I have heard it in the night, and I have heard it in the daytime. I have heard it in the house, and I have heard it outdoors. Only when I was with my brother, however.

I watched his struggles; I heard the dog. I saw the drooping left eyelid many times. At such times I simply warned by brother. Invariably he would rush to a mirror and stand there yelling, apparently at himself, till the droop would leave the eyelid, and his whole aspect return to normal. And that strange pointing of the face, giving a quite canine expression to the features, would go away, too.

I begged him to consult a doctor. But can you blame him if he demurred? His is admittedly an abnor-

mal ailment. But lately he has been growing weaker. It takes much longer now for his face to resume a normal appearance; each visitation is becoming more prolonged. Finally, in desperation, he agreed to let me see you about it, because he believes you are an old and trusted friend of mine. That is all.

* * * *

A LIGHT snow began to fall outside the windows of Dr. Barton's consulting room, adding to an accumulation of an earlier and heavier fall. The psychiatrist got up and watched the gentle flakes through the window. That such things as he had just heard could be in a world so white, in a world so clean!

"You say your brother has frequently been seized with paroxysms of extreme nervousness?" he asked presently.

"Yes. When he has them he shakes till his teeth rattle. Some muscles stiffen, others grow flabby and useless. The arms and legs go into all manner of strange contortions. The face pales, but no sweat forms. He has an almost uncontrollable impulse to crawl on his hands and knees, and to try and bark like a dog. I might add that it is at such times that he apparently most greatly realizes his danger, and fights hardest to escape. All the strength in his body seems to come from an outside source—and it is this outside strength he fights."

"Nervous persons are subject to all manner of—delusions," observed the doctor thoughtfully. "Oh, I know you said you heard the barking, you saw the terrible struggles of the patient, seemingly with the supernatural, the unearthly—the *unnatural*. But I mark you heard the barking *only* when in company of your brother. I take it he is a man of perhaps middle years?"

"Forty-five."

"A most susceptible age. Bachelors begin to be sorry for the lonely stretch ahead, and married mourn the adventurous days of their youth. Both look back to the days of their vanished youth—not ahead to the future. If you have ever been to a col-

lege reunion you will know what I mean. Does Brown, of the class of Fifteen, talk about that boy of his who is in high school? Or his girl who is going to wow them in pictures? He will if he finds time. But he is generally so busy telling about the time he made a touchdown in the last two seconds of play that it is extremely doubtful.

"Tell me: when your brother was a college man was he not one of those active young men who are mixed up in everything—much mischief included? Ah, Yes. So he was interested mostly in amateur theatricals, he could sing, eh? And 'strum the banjo? He was quite a ventriloquist, too, wasn't he. . . ."

"How you guessed it, I do not know," Forrest said. "But you have him right—even down to his trick of ventriloquism. Good God! You don't mean—you can't mean—"

"That he has been deluding you—himself—with unconscious ventriloquism? Why not? Dead dogs can't bark, but middle-aged men who want to hang on to the past, can promote such a depth of nervous feeling as to revert, subconsciously and entirely unknown to themselves, to the glorified tricks of their youth. The dog's death had been preying on your brother's mind for a month, remember. He had been expecting something. Nothing happened; so unconsciously he made happen what he had expected to happen, what he had expected for a month of days and nights under extreme nervous pressure even in his sleep."

"Doctor!" Frank Forrest exclaimed fervently. "Thank God, Doctor!"

"The thing is almost self-explanatory," the psychiatrist expatiated suavely. "Pause and consider: In the night club, they stared at him because they thought it was he who was barking. Can so many people be wrong? People began to point him out as an odd character who barks like a dog? Again, can so many be wrong? He has learned to control his left eyelid, not a very remarkable feat under certain nervous conditions. He probably wiggled his ears as a boy—you thought nothing of that. You heard

the bark, but always when he was near. He fought with something not even he could see! I'll tell you why. He loved that dog as much as it loved him. What he was fighting was a memory."

"Doctor!" again cried Forrest, his eyes shining with gratitude. "You don't know how I thank you! You don't know what a relief this is!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense! Ah, there's the telephone. . . . Hello. . . . Yes, Mr. Forrest is here. . . . Hello. . . . Don't be so excited. Just one moment please."

"Hello," said Forrest as the phone was handed over to him. "You say he's worse? Well, there's nothing to worry about, really. The doctor has just explained it all to me. Just a moment. . . ." He turned quickly to the psychiatrist, anxiety again in his eyes. "Doctor, can you come now? I left my brother in care of a powerful young male nurse while I came over to see you, and now he tells me my brother is getting too strong for him. He says he can't hold him—and that he's *changing*!"

"Nonsense!" the great doctor repeated, and laughed. "But of course we'll leave at once."

They drove swiftly through a world of white; white snowflakes gently drifting down; white rooftops; skeletal white trees, white arms beseeching a white heaven. A white road, and the crunch of speeding tires all white with powdered snow. A white car.

THE air felt clean and good and bracing, as if it must be white. And in the mind of each was once more that terrifying thought: That such things could be, in a world so clean, so white!

They arrived in a flurry and stamped the snow off their feet as they raced up the steps. It was early afternoon, but hazy with falling snow.

A badly frightened male nurse, all in white, too, came running to them as they entered. He stammered so

they could hardly understand him.

"He locked himself in his room!" He pointed upstairs and choked out: "Good God! I hope I never have to see such a face on a man again as long as I live!"

"Calmly, calmly," the doctor cautioned.

They went upstairs.

Forrest knocked on the door of his brother's room. He received no reply. He knocked again and called his name. Still there was no reply. An icy fear, a dread unnameable, began to grip Frank Forrest. He stared into the doctor's troubled eyes, and derived no comfort from what he saw there.

"Open up!" he yelled frantically, pounding on the door. "Open up, or I'll break the door down!"

There was no answer.

Forrest, a powerful man, heaved back and crashed his shoulder into the door with tremendous impact. The door shook, and it sprang slightly, then gave abruptly, he crashed with it into the room. Simultaneous with the thundering impact, someone shot out through the open window of the room.

Forrest was up on his feet in an instant. "Quick!" he yelled, and was running already. "After him! He's dived into the snow!"

The three men raced down the stairs so fast they almost fell over each other. The ill man had leaped out of a window in the back of the house and they had to run around from the front door. It took little time, but when they pushed their way through the snow there was no one there. Only a swiftly diminishing snow-covered speck in the hazy distance, going with incredible speed.

The men did not run after him for a reason. To catch the astonishingly swift runner would be next to impossible, in the snow, but that was not the real reason.

He made a plain trail in the snow, and that was the reason. He made a plain trail—of giant dog tracks!

*Next Issue: THE PANTING BEAST, a Complete
Novolet of Hellhound Terror by JOHN CLEMONS*

JOLIPER'S GIFT

By ELDON HEATH

Author of "The Missing," "A Visit from the Stars," etc.



*Beware the Gods Bearing
Gifts, for Whom They Would
Destroy They Still Make Mad!*

"Have you anything to say, Mr. Joliper?"

UP TO that morning in the bank vault, when the huge ledger fell from the top shelf and conked him, Herman Joliper had led a prosaic life. While it couldn't have been called strictly ethical, at least it had been a normal sort of bachelor existence. Every Sunday morning he went to church and dropped a quarter into the collection plate. Every week day he kept books from A to F at the Merchants' National Bank and took a few dollars out of the general funds.

On Saturday he played the horses.

He lost occasionally, of course. That was to be expected. But generally he won, because he was a wizard at picking horses for small money to place or show. On Monday his accounts would be straight again.

Technically, Mr. Joliper was an embezzler, short-term, and only for trifling sums. He was not essentially dishonest. He had not the talent for handling big money, nor the courage to abscond.

Peckwith, now, was different. Joliper, however, didn't know much about Peckwith until after that ponderous

ledger slammed him into a state of unconsciousness.

Without the slightest warning, as though it had been slyly pushed off the shelf by a mischievous pixie, the ledger dropped and struck him squarely on the head, slamming him to the floor.

When he awoke to find a couple of fellow clerks rendering him first aid, he was in possession of his great gift. He was, of course, unaware of it at the moment. Like many great discoveries, it had to grow upon him. Save for the bump on his noggin, there was no outward indication that the meek and quiet little rabbit of a Joliper had undergone an amazing transmogrification.

It was not until an hour later, this Monday morning, that Joliper became aware of his gift. For a moment, he let his thoughts stray from his ledgers. He wondered idly what was going on in the president's office? Did J. B. have any inkling of Joliper's juggling of the petty cash? Did he even suspect the change of figures in the Baldworth account that Joliper had just managed to set straight this minute? It was the B ledger which had conked Joliper.

The moment he thought about the president's office, seeing its appointments in his mind's eye, Joliper heard President Winton's voice as plainly as if Peckwith, at his side, had suddenly spoken in J. B.'s accents.

"Take a letter, Miss Leeds. Mr. John Henry Tolen. Dear Sir. In regard to the report on your wife's savings account—"

JOLIPER started violently. He had seen Miss Leeds go into J. B.'s office with her notebook just a minute before. This was amazing. It was more than that—it was inexplicable. He glanced quickly at Peckwith to see if the cashier had heard those words. But Peckwith was poring over his books, oblivious to all that went on about him.

J. B.'s voice had cut off as abruptly as a broken telephone connection the instant Joliper began thinking about Peckwith. Joliper rubbed his ears, but nothing happened.

He took careful stock of himself. He felt all right, only astonished. He touched the bump on his head. It was still sensitive, though not too much so. He had forgotten all about it, in fact. But he had also forgotten to think about what was going on in Winton's office. After a bit he began again to wonder about this, choosing to think of the intruding voice as a brief auditory hallucination.

The instant he began to wonder about the inner room, he heard as clearly as before. This time there were two voices. Joliper mastered his amazement and listened. This was not difficult, especially since he recognized the second voice as that of Vice-president Johnson. J. B. was talking about the bank business now. And he was saying not a word about Joliper. What a relief—if Joliper could believe it.

Joliper let thought of the office slip from him and began to ponder his peculiar new affliction. In that stage, it was still an affliction to him. He did not know what to make of it, save to connect it vaguely with the bump on his head.

The fact was, Joliper had become clairaudient. He could hear what was being said in any place to which he directed his thought. That he had some faint inkling of this was apparent in his experiments. After adequate thought, he arrived at the conclusion that his affliction was either a permanent state, or an illusion. If it were an illusion, naturally what he heard would not be true.

So, deliberately, he concentrated on J. B.'s office. Once more he heard the voices rising as if next his ears.

"Will you ask Mr. Joliper whether he's seen the Fortly bonds, Johnson?"

"Yes, Mr. Winton," Johnson's voice replied.

That was testing with a vengeance, thought Joliper. He half turned toward the door of the office, as if thinking that Johnson might come through. It was ridiculous, he reflected, and he could not help grinning. How could he have thought such a thing!

The door of the office opened and Johnson came out, walked straight to-

ward him, his fussy hands fingering his pince-nez.

"Ah—Mr. Joliper, those Fortly bonds. You had them last, I believe. Mr. Winton would like to know where they are."

For a moment, Joliper stared at him agape. Then he swallowed.

"The Fortly bonds? I put them in your desk—in the upper right drawer."

"Thank you, Joliper." Johnson went over to his desk, got the bonds, and returned to the office.

Joliper put his pen down. Once more he cautiously felt the bump on his head. It was going down now, but he began to feel a little anxious. He got up and drew himself a cup of water, stood for a few moments looking out into the street. A soft footfall made him turn.

PECKWITH had come up, blinking owl-like, for a drink.

"It's just two o'clock, Joliper. They'll be deciding on that new issue at Selton's. I wonder what they'll do." He raised his cup to his lips and drank slowly.

Instantly Joliper thought, if the office, why not Selton's? In a trice, he thought of the long, narrow room where Selton's board would meet, visualized them there, and heard their voices. They were rising to a vote. He heard old Selton audibly counting the ayes.

Peckwith put down his cup and wiped his mustache.

"Didn't you hear me?" he demanded.

"I was thinking," said Joliper, his gaze distant. "They're going to put out a new issue."

"Ridiculous!" snorted Peckwith.

"Want to bet on it?"

"Ten dollars," agreed Peckwith promptly.

"Done."

Joliper won ten dollars before the close of the day. He went home that afternoon walking on air. The bump was gone from his head, but his gift was with him still. He went like a man before whom the world has opened out. Uppermost in his mind was one thought that buoyed him up. The possibilities of his gift were unlimited!

From then on, life changed for Joliper.

The first thing to which he turned his thoughts was the racing track. He listened time after time to gossip in the stables, at the bookmaker's, wherever horses were intelligently discussed. True, he heard a lot of irrelevant conversation, some of which made him blush, but he got the real dope on horses, and that was the main thing.

He began to make bets with uncanny accuracy, gradually getting into the big money. Then came the day of the Hialeah Handicap.

For the first time in his life, Joliper plunged. He took ten thousand dollars from the bank's vault and socked it all on Tea Biscuits to win. Tea Biscuits accommodated him by three lengths. Joliper replaced the ten thousand in the vault and deposited twenty thousand in the Federal Reserve Bank across the street.

That Monday morning the world was positively roseate. It was at that moment that fate raised its grisly head in the shape of Mr. Peckwith. Irritated and annoyed beyond measure that Joliper had taken him over to the tune of ten dollars, Mr. Peckwith became curious. How could Joliper, who seldom guessed right, have been so accurate about the Selton business?

To think, with Mr. Peckwith, was to act. If Joliper was in the confidence of J. B. to this extent, it looked as if Joliper was being groomed for the Peckwithian job. To find out what, if any, details Joliper knew that he didn't, Peckwith took to staying late and working very diligently over Joliper's ledger.

WHAT he learned was startling. But the Monday morning corrections had him fooled. So Peckwith kept his knowledge of Joliper's pilfering to himself. And this Monday morning he permitted himself the luxury of a little first-class blackmail.

"Er—Joliper," he said smoothly, cackling in that dry, senile laugh of his that was an insult to self-respecting eardrums. "What, may I ask, did you do with that ten thousand dollars you—er—borrowed last week? I

hardly expected to see you here this morning."

This was unwise on the part of Peckwith.

For a moment Joliper was startled. Then he got control of himself.

"Are you nuts, Peckwith?" he demanded tersely.

The cashier pointed with one bony finger to the ledger sheet, where Joliper had just changed a set of figures in the Atwell account.

"Oh, that?" said Joliper. "A transposition of figures. I made a mistake Friday and didn't find it until this morning."

"A ten-thousand-dollar mistake, and you let it ride over the week-end? Come now, Joliper, I'm not so dumb as that. I know what you've been doing. You've been playing the horses for months, maybe years, with the bank's funds. But how do you manage to put the money back? That's the secret I want to know."

The fat was in the fire. Joliper realized that. The question was, had the prying Peckwith talked to anybody?

"If you are accusing me of having embezzled one cent from this institution, Peckwith," he began indignantly, "I'll have you know that my accounts balance to the penny, and I—"

"I know that," agreed Peckwith, chuckling slyly. "I still want to know, how do you do it?"

Joliper reflected. To answer would be to admit nothing to the weasel of a cashier.

"I listen to confidential tips on the races," he said soberly.

"You what? Who would talk confidentially in front of you? Besides, you never hang around touts or pool-rooms. I've shadowed you."

This was revealing. Unfortunately, Joliper's gift did not include the psychic ability to follow the thoughts which passed through a person's mind.

"I don't go anywhere to hear such talk," he confided. "I just listen."

"You mean you can just concentrate wherever you are and—*hear*?"

"Precisely."

Peckwith sneered. "Then who is going to win at Tia Juana next Saturday?"

"How would I know that offhand?" asked Joliper. "I'll have to listen for several days to get that dope."

Peckwith chuckled again. For the first time, Joliper realized that he had always hated the cashier. But Peckwith seemed undisturbed. He poked at Joliper's fat stomach with his bony forefinger.

"That's my price for silence, Joliper," he declared significantly. "Tell me by Friday which horse will win."

"But—but I have quit playing the horses," protested Joliper. "Gambling is wrong. It leads to worse things. Beginning yesterday, I started putting a dollar in the collection plate."

"I am not interested in your religious activities," stated Mr. Peckwith succinctly. "I want to know who is going to win the money race next Saturday. And no tricks, mind you. I was born with a caul over my face, and I am the seventh son of a seventh son. Fail me, and I will go straight to J. B. with what I know."

THAT threat put Joliper in forty-nine kinds of a pickle. There was nothing to do but comply. For three days he listened frantically to pool-room dope. Finally, by listening in on the conversation of two jockeys, it sifted down to one horse being the odds-on favorite.

"Doughnuts in the fourth," he told Peckwith Friday morning.

"How much are you betting?" asked Peckwith bluntly.

"Nothing. I told you I don't play the horses any more."

Peckwith just laughed his horrible, dry chuckle.

"You'd better be right, Joliper, or, you know," he flung over his shoulder as he went back to his desk.

Joliper understood that, like Sinbad, he was saddled with an old man of the sea. Tomorrow's race would not see the end of Peckwith. He would come back again and again, and Joliper would have to guess right every time.

It came to him that it was necessary to remove Peckwith.

The rest of the day he toyed with this thought, his mind constantly on his Nemesis. He even followed Peck-

with out to lunch with his mind's eye. Suddenly he heard Peckwith's voice.

"Give me another dozen of those sleeping tablets, please," it said. "I don't rest well at night."

"Yes, sir," answered the voice of the drug clerk in the store down the block. "Heavy work at the bank, Mr. Peckwith?"

"Yes," answered Peckwith, and his hideous chuckling indicated the double meaning of his jest.

Joliper knew that the cashier was buying medicine in the drug store. The big idea came to him—just like that.

That night he went to Peckwith's house with a pint of whiskey in one pocket and an ounce of chloral hydrate in the other. It was easy to get to Peckwith's room without being seen.

Peckwith was surprised to see him, but Joliper had a good excuse.

"Since we are friends and partners, in a way," he said, "I thought it would be nice for us to celebrate together and toast our luck on tomorrow's race out at Tia Juana."

"A good idea, Joliper," agreed Peckwith, giving his dry cackle. "You're not such a bad sort, after all. Maybe having a clairaudient sense is making you a good fellow."

It was making Joliper a very good fellow. He stayed with Peckwith until the pint was gone and Peckwith was sleeping soundly. Then, considerately, he put Peckwith to bed, removed all evidence of the drinking bout and departed quietly, leaving Mr. Peckwith to snore his comatose way into eternity.

In the morning, when Peckwith did not show up with his usual punctuality at the bank, there was an investigation. By noon the sad facts were in the early editions. Theophilus Peckwith, cashier of the Merchants' National Bank, was dead. He had taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. Accidental death. Cut down in the flower of his maturity. A wreath from the bank, the usual condolences, and a new employee Monday morning. Businesslike—that was the J. B. system.

With idle interest, Joliper listened to the radio reports on the races at Tia

Juana Saturday afternoon. For once the dopesters had been badly in error. Doughnuts must have got dunked in the mud, for he came in a furlong behind. Joliper sighed in relief. He had disposed of Peckwith just in time. For, if the cashier had lived to play that tip, there would have been an unpleasant scene in J. B.'s office Monday morning.

AS IT was, Monday morning Joliper was promoted to Peckwith's position. Andrews, the new man, got the accounts from A to F. This was so comforting to Joliper that he focused his mind on J. B.'s office to hear what the president thought of the new cashier.

J. B. was talking very confidentially to Johnson.

"You know, Curtis," he was saying, "Joliper is a deserving man and—"

Quite suddenly J. B.'s voice clicked off, to be superseded by a strange, cackling laugh. Joliper jerked upright and listened in amazement. That wasn't Johnson's laugh. Then, with a disturbing shock, he recognized it. It was Peckwith's!

He felt a chilling sensation along his spine. Peckwith was dead and buried. He had gone to the funeral himself yesterday afternoon. It was impossible for him to be remembering the cashier's horrible laughter. For this was no remembered sound. It was real, it was now, it was present—beating fresh against his eardrums. Joliper swallowed, got down carefully from his stool, took up some papers, and marched straight into the president's office.

J. B. and Johnson were alone together. They looked up in surprise at his entrance. He mumbled an excuse and withdrew. Then he kept his mind on the office as he trudged back to his desk.

"Joliper is—" began Johnson's voice, to be immediately drowned in that hellish tittering which blotted out everything else.

Joliper was in a cold sweat as he returned to his desk. The laughter faded away the moment he got to work. But every time he started thinking about distant things, that horrible

cachinnation dinned in his ears like the steady roaring of the sea.

Desperate, that night he went home and tried to follow different people he had successfully listened to during the past weeks. It was useless. Nothing came out of the silence but the laugh of Peckwith. Joliper learned each tiny inflection of the dead cashier's laugh, from his faintest titter to his huskiest guffaw—if a hyena laugh could be called a guffaw.

He was nearly mad with rage, helpless and impotent rage, by the time he went to sleep.

"Damn you, Peckwith!" he cried fiercely. "You're dead, do you hear? I've done with you and your blackmail! Damn your caul and your seven times seven. What the devil are you laughing at, anyhow? You can't communicate with anybody about my accounts now."

Resolutely, he made his mind a blank and went to sleep. The laughter faded into nothingness.

Next morning Joliper found a shocking surprise awaiting him at the bank. J. B. and Johnson were there with a bank examiner. Andrews, the new man on accounts A to F, was there, pale and disheveled. He looked as though he hadn't slept all night. He hadn't.

"Sit down, Mr. Joliper," ordered J. B. in a stern but shocked voice. "Andrews and the bank examiner have been going over your books. It seems that you embezzled twenty thousand dollars Friday morning from the Atwell account. Don't trouble to deny it. Here are your books. Also, our detective agency checked up on your movements for that day and found that you sent the entire amount to Nolan's poolroom to bet on a horse called Doughnuts. And you lost."

He shoved the A ledger over for Joliper to see. Joliper stared in amazement at the incredible evidence before

him. Moreover, he recognized the spidery handwriting. It was not his own, but so nearly like it that no one would believe him.

It was Peckwith's!

"Peckwith," he spluttered. "It was Peckwith who—"

"Yes," agreed J. B. icily, "it was Peckwith. We found his diary this morning. His suspicions of you, and everything else. He was apparently ready to lay the matter before me when he took an overdose of sleeping medicine. Poor fellow, no wonder he couldn't sleep."

JOHNSON leaned forward. "Anything to say, Mr. Joliper?"

"It was Peckwith," repeated Joliper stolidly.

The bank examiner stood up briskly.

"Too bad," he said in curt tones.

"You're under arrest, Joliper."

"But I didn't take the money!" Joliper shouted. "It was Peckwith. I can easily replace it, but I didn't take it!"

"Certainly you will replace it," said J. B. "But the evidence is too plain to permit us to overlook it. We must prosecute."

Joliper was in a daze as he suffered himself to be led out of the bank. All he could realize was that Peckwith had been too cagey, after all. Instead of risking such a bet in his own name, he had done it all in Joliper's name, and Joliper's past record left no room for doubt as to the guilty party.

Following him to the bar of retribution, there dinned in his ears the horrific laughter that was like the scaly rustling of snakes. He knew that he would come out of the penitentiary a gibbering maniac. For every time he sought relief, every time in an unguarded moment that he let his thoughts stray away from what was solidly around him, he heard nothing but the tittering, cackling laughter of Peckwith.

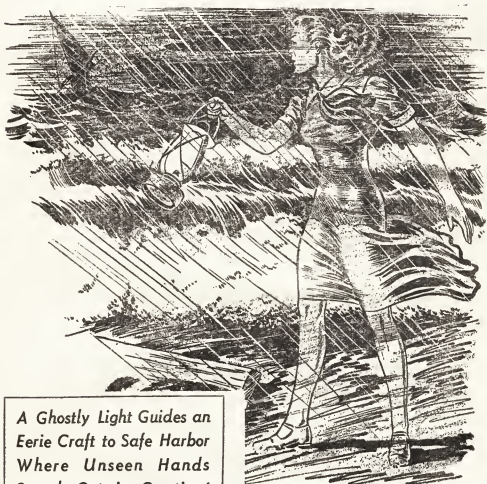
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*Next Issue: Complete Weird Novelets by DON ALVISO
and JOHN CLEMONS—Plus Eleven Other
Gripping Tales of the Uncanny*

The Thirteenth Boat

By GEORGE J. RAWLINS

Author of "The Light Must Burn," "Hound of the Haunted Trial," etc.



*A Ghostly Light Guides an
Eerie Craft to Safe Harbor
Where Unseen Hands
Stretch Out in Greeting!*

*Anabelle always guided
Jesse in with a lantern*

I 'VE never seen a ghost—properly speaking. As I take it, a ghost is a disembodied spirit, or maybe an animated corpse, or perhaps a Zombie, and I can't say I've ever seen either. But you have to believe in a lot of

things you don't really see—like the wind in that jib sail, say. You don't see the wind, yet you know it's there. If you knew nothing about wind, and saw its effect only once in a lifetime, you'd call it supernatural!

Maybe it was something like that with Jesse Autrey and Anabelle Tate. Never heard of anybody meeting up with the ghost of either of them. They're both dead and properly buried by now, over on the mainland, and I reckon they'll stay that way! But there was a time when Anabelle—Well, what I mean to say is that when fifteen or twenty men all see the same thing at the same time, and there's no reasonable way to account for what they see, it sort of gets you to wondering.

It was this way—to begin at the beginning. Less than a dozen families lived on Pelican Key, and in a little settlement like that everybody knows everybody else's business. So it wasn't any secret that Jesse was going to marry Anabelle as soon as he could buy a boat of his own.

Jesse operated a little ketch which somebody let him have on shares, and you don't get rich fishing when you have to divide the profits. It was a small, seaworthy boat, name *Kingfisher*, but the auxiliary had gone haywire and couldn't be depended on. Jesse relied mostly on his sails.

We didn't have any strict organization on Pelican Key. By common consent, old Cap'n Ludberry sort of managed things. We pooled our catch, and he bargained with the run-boats that brought us ice down from Miami and bought our fish.

We fished beyond the outer reef in the edge of the Gulf Stream, and generally stayed in sight of each other. In the afternoon we'd all come in together. If Jesse's motor quit on him—which it usually did—he'd be left behind and get in after dark.

WHEN that happened, especially if the weather was squally, Anabelle would cross the mangroves to the beach on the ocean side of the island, and swing a lantern to guide Jesse in! It wasn't at all necessary, but she liked to do it and he got a big kick out of it. Of course we kidded him a lot, and got to calling her the "Lantern Girl."

Then came that hurricane of two summers ago. We knew about it several days before, but the fish were

running and the price was right, so we went out every day. It certainly seemed safe enough! The radio reported on the storm every three hours. We could follow its path on the chart and were ready to run if it turned our way.

The morning of the day that the strange thing happened that nobody could explain—though they saw them with their own eyes—the weather looked fine and the barometer stood at 29.90. The hurricane had worked up through the Bahamas to a point east of us. Everybody predicted it would keep on going northward and miss us entirely. We felt as safe as we'd ever felt when we left Pelican Key that morning.

The fishing was the best I've ever seen and we were making a real haul. We kept following the schools farther and farther out into the Stream. About noon, the wind dropped, but by the middle of the afternoon it began to blow a little out of the northwest.

I stopped hauling in fish long enough to look around me, and saw Cap'n Ludberry's boat high-tailing it for shore with the old man's shirt flying from the masthead. One glance at the sky was enough! I pulled my lines and followed him with my six cylinders wide open.

We rounded Pelican Key and ran into the lagoon just as it began to blow in dead earnest. For the next half hour everybody worked like mad putting out hurricane moorings and tightening down everything aboard. At last my boat was snug, and I crawled into my cabin. Not until then did I have time to wonder about Jesse, and if he'd made it to the key with the *Kingfisher*.

That's all I could do—wonder. For after a hurricane strikes there's nothing much you can do but stay put. That is, if the thing you're holding onto doesn't get up and leave you! So I rode it out aboard my boat.

The hurricane had suddenly moved shoreward. The center passed to the north of us, so we caught the west wind in the southern half of it, blowing straight out to sea. . . .

Not until the wind died the next

morning could we get out to check up on the damage. It was plenty!

Then we discovered that Jesse hadn't made it! He and the *Kingfisher* were missing—had never reached the lagoon!

When I went ashore, Anabelle's folks were carrying her in from the beach. They'd forbidden her to go out in such weather, but she slipped from the house after dark. With the wind behind her she had crossed the Key to the beach on the ocean side, in an effort to show her lantern and guide Jesse in! An impossible job!

The lantern got smashed and she lost it. She couldn't get back home against that wind, and got pretty badly banged up! How she managed to live through it, out there all night in the open with tree limbs flying through the air, is by me!

Well, we notified the Coast Guard about Jesse. They searched the area with planes and asked ships in the vicinity to look for him. It seemed almost useless for us to go looking for him, too, but we did. That offshore wind might have blown him clear to the Bahamas, if the *Kingfisher* hadn't gone down, so we covered the sea as best we could all the way to Andros Island. All we found was part of a cabin roof which we thought belonged to the *Kingfisher*!

As time went on, hope for Jesse died. A fishing ketch can ride out most any squall, but a hurricane's a different thing! There wasn't a chance in a hundred that his boat hadn't swamped. Still, he might have been picked up by some ship without radio, bound for the Lord knows where.

By the time Anabelle recovered from that night on the beach, people began saying her mind was affected. A lot of gossip among the women, I thought. But it wasn't! She knew Jesse was dead, yet wouldn't admit it even to herself!

She would talk to you about Jesse like he'd come back any day, and tell you all the things they were going to do. Then if you mentioned any other subject she would just stare off into space and didn't even hear you.

As soon as she was able, she started going back to the beach every eve-

ning with a lantern. Her folks tried to talk her out of it, but it wasn't any use. I tell you it was pitiful—her waiting and longing, and waving that lantern for Jesse, dead sure he would come back to her.

Whenever we'd come in after dark we'd see her lantern swinging along the beach. It got to be right spooky! Gave you kind of a creepy feeling! Boats from other keys saw it, too, and pretty soon everybody knew about the "Lantern Girl." The name we had given her in that laughing way wasn't funny any more.

It was so pitiful it kind of squeezed your heart.

Then one night Anabelle didn't come home. They found her sitting on the beach leaning against a palm stump, her new lantern beside her. Her hands were folded in her lap, and her eyes were wide open staring out to sea—where Jesse had gone! She was stone dead! She'd been dead quite a while. . . . But her lantern still burned!

They buried Anabelle on the mainland. Maybe I oughtn't say it, but I found it quite a relief not to see her lantern swinging to and fro on the black shoreline every time you brought your boat in after dark!

That was in the late fall. Winter tourists began to arrive. The Keys are pretty busy in tourist season, what with sports fishermen coming down and millionaires' luxury yachts basking in our winter sunshine. As usual, some of us painted up our boats and left Pelican Key. We shaved every day, put on yacht uniforms and went into charter-boat service for the winter months.

IN THE spring, as tourist business went slack we drifted back to commercial fishing, and old Cap'n Ludberry welcomed us again to Pelican Key. By then, Anabelle had become just a legend to most of us.

That was a trying summer. Hot and still, with lots of nasty weather between times. And then something happened that was eerie enough in itself, even if you wasn't squeamish. But it wasn't a patch on what was coming.

I forget now who first saw the thing but it happened on an afternoon when we ran in ahead of a stiff squall. One of the fellows had motor trouble, and came in after dark, looking kind of pale around the gills. He was pretty mad too, of two minds whether to have the shivers about what he'd seen, or to jump whoever had been playing a pretty gruesome joke on him.

"Who waved that lantern down on the beach?" was the first thing he asked.

Nobody, as far as we knew, and it was some time before he would believe it. Then finally he admitted it looked awfully like Anabelle's lantern.

Well, sir, we kidded him high about that. Told him a lightning bug had scared him. But if we'd had any slightest idea of what was coming our laughs might have been more like the soundless ones of grinning skulls.

The same thing happened again several times that summer. Always to different people, and always during bad weather. A few of us still laughed about it, and the rest just tried to. Things like that have a way of sticking in your mind, and a man doesn't spend his life on the open sea where he's pretty close to the stars and the wide ocean that just seems to go on and on without coming to think a lot of things might happen that plenty of folks would never believe *could* happen.

It must have been close to a year since Jesse had been lost in the *Kingfisher*, that my boat went on the ways with a broken rudder. While waiting shipment of parts, I helped Cap'n Ludberry on his boat. We were fishing farther out than usual when a big squall began making up. Ludberry signaled the other boats and we started for shore.

"Course this ain't no hurricane," he said to me, "but the weather looks just like it did a year ago when we lost Jesse."

Funny! Neither of us had mentioned Jesse, but I'd been thinking exactly the same thing.

That squall came up in no time. The wind hit us long before we reached the reef. Inside the reef is

shallow water, and three miles of narrow channel with coral bottom on either side. No place to be in a blow, when you can't see twenty yards through the rain.

The wind had risen to a gale in no time. Ludberry saw the rain would catch us in the channel if we kept on our course, so he circled back out to sea, all the other boats following, and headed into the storm. Better to ride it out in deep water than risk ripping a bottom on the coral.

THAT was some blow! The wind came straight out of the east, and lasted until after dark. Then it was over as suddenly as it started. Squalls are like that down here.

We had already run up our lights, and when the rain stopped I spotted the lights of several of our boats. When we crossed the reef and entered the channel it looked like the whole fleet was following us.

"Count 'em up," said Cap'n Ludberry. "Ought to be twelve boats, counting us."

I counted as we rounded an elbow in the channel. "Thirteen," I said.

"Can't be," said Ludberry, and he named them off. "Take the wheel while I count 'em."

"Thirteen's right!" he said, after a while.

There was something in his voice that made you shiver as hard as knowing there was thirteen boats—and deep down inside you knowing who was steering that extra boat. Though you wouldn't have said a word about that to save your life. You just *knew* somehow. That was enough. And it made your tongue stick tight to the roof of your mouth, and feel like you didn't have anything but water in your veins. It was that spooky.

"Must have picked up a stranger somewheres," Ludberry said, calmly, but you could tell easy he didn't feel so calm.

We said no more about it then, for Pelican Key loomed black ahead of us.

Then something caught my eye and I just about stopped breathing. It filled in with this other thing that already had my skin crawling and my heart in my mouth.

First time I'd seen the thing! Along the shore of Pelican Key a light was moving. A light like somebody waving a lantern! Anabelle's lantern?

I'd laughed at the other fellows for getting scared of a speck of light a mile away. I didn't laugh now! I had a feeling like a trickle of ice water was running down my back. When Ludberry spoke, right at my elbow, I'd of jumped out of my shoes if I hadn't been barefooted!

"Do you see what I do?" he asked, and I'd never heard Ludberry's voice sound so shaky and uncertain, ever before.

I swallowed hard. "Cap'n, it—it's Anabelle's light."

"It's some darn fool playing a trick on us," said the old man. He was trying to convince himself—I could see that—but wasn't making such a good job of it. For from the looks of his eyes, if ever a man was seeing ghosts, Cap'n Ludberry was.

I hoped he was right, though, and said so.

Ludberry swallowed hard.

"I'm going to find out who it is," Ludberry said, kinda tight and anxious, though, "and wring his neck."

He knew who was holding that lantern just as well as I did—but neither one of us would admit that it was Anabelle. Why, she was lying quiet in her grave over the mainland, and how could she—

As we rounded Pelican Key, the light still waved. I watched it till the mangrove trees on the point of the island hid the beach from sight, and I got an idea that sure enough there was something about that light that sure wasn't like any light that ever was in this world.

WE SLIPPED into the lagoon and tied up in a hurry. The other boats came in close behind us. I counted them again. In fact, I counted them several times. Twelve! Only twelve! Had another boat come in with the fleet, and then somehow disappeared? Because there wasn't a chance in the world that Cap'n Lud-

berry and I hadn't seen and counted thirteen boats outside!

Everybody was talking at once about Anabelle's light. No laughing now! They had all seen it. Every man in every boat!

"Quick, some of you fellows," Cap'n Ludberry shouted in the darkness. "Grab flashlights and come with me. We're going over to the beach and look into this!"

It took some doing, and I'll admit my own knees were shaking, but anyhow all of us went.

Well, sir, nobody was playing a joke on us! That is, I'm as sure as I ever was of anything in my life that nobody was. We didn't find anybody on the beach. Or properly speaking, what I mean to say is we didn't find any living person there!

What we did find was the weather-beaten wreck of a boat. Her paint was peeling. Both masts had been broken off short. The low, forward cabin had its roof blown away. Obviously an old derelict washed ashore in the squall—yet there was something very familiar about the lines of her. Was this the thirteenth boat?

Across the stern we could still make out the name—you guessed it—*Kingfisher*!

In the open cockpit, half covered by sun-bleached clothing which the birds had torn to ribbons, lay the chalk-white skeleton of Jesse Autrey!

A few yards back on the beach—not buried in the sand, but laying like someone had dropped it there—we found a battered and rusty old lantern. The lantern Anabelle had lost the night of the hurricane!

We buried all that was left of Jesse in a grave beside Anabelle.

A good many months have passed, but no one since then has seen a ghostly light waving on stormy nights along the beach of Pelican Key. I'm pretty certain nobody ever will see it again!

No, I've never seen a ghost. Unless a dancing light that might be a firefly could be called a ghost. But as I said before, you've got to believe in a lot of things you don't really see!

The Life-Bringer Plays a Weird Jest!

Song of the Sun

By BERNARD BRESLAUER

Author of "Ghost Knife," "He Who Spoke," etc.

(Illustrated on the Cover of this Issue)

IT WAS a bitter winter. Winter is not pretty in the city. In the country the snow remains clean, and the phrase, "pure as the driven snow," though somewhat over-sentimental, is also meaningful. But in the city the feet of men and the tires of machines, the trappings and the traffic, soil it quickly.

Not since 1888 had New York known a winter like this one—a winter of enormous snowfalls, intense cold, and sunlessness. Sunlessness. The Weather Bureau said that the record for sunless days was already broken and it was only mid-winter. People are not cheerful beneath gray skies. They need sunlight.

The city grew tired of putting on its galoshes and taking them off, of sloshing through slush, of wetting its feet and catching cold—but most of all it grew tired of the sunlessness, the skies that were always gray. Men cannot change the weather. For the most part they must take it as it comes. A fortunate few, however, if the weather is unpleasant where they are, can travel to where it is pleasant.

Letty Fenton was preparing to do so. On the morrow she would be aboard the yacht steaming coastwise down to Palm Beach. The yacht, at present anchored in the Hudson, would take her toward sunshine, white sand, warm bathing, and mild, flower-scented breeze.

It was evening. She sat before her dressing table, brushing her auburn hair, her head tilted now this side, now that, as she brought the gold-backed brush down in the vigorous yet somehow feminine gesture which women use when so engaged. It was

the one thing she did for herself. All other things were done for her.

This latter fact was perhaps reflected in her face, which had beauty but also the faint, indefinable aura of the spoiled and pampered.

Behind her and a little off to the



Letty Fenton

side, though reflected in the triptych dressing-table mirror, another girl sat before an *escritoire*, writing. There was a vague family resemblance, as though the girls were cousins, which if fact they were.

Annabella Saunders would have seemed to the superficial observer to possess less beauty than her auburn-haired cousin. She was plainly dressed, in tailored mode, and her hair was severely coiffed. She had

the trim, efficient look of the secretary about her, and that in fact was what she was—her cousin's social secretary.

An observer less superficial would have accounted her more beautiful than her cousin. He would have noted the clear blue eyes, the regular features, the flawless though pale complexion, and he would have sensed a depth in her that was either absent in her cousin or covered up by the trappings and habits of luxury.

Letty Fenton addressed Annabella's reflection in the mirror. As she spoke she raised her arms and stretched her slender body sinuously.

"Thank the Lord I'll be far away from all this slush and sleet by this time tomorrow. Sunshine, Annabella. Think of it."

Annabella kept on writing, but a wistful light had leaped up in her eyes.

"I *am* thinking of it, Letty," she said levelly.

WORDS, when used in a certain way, sometimes convey more meaning than the words themselves contain. They are then like outer coverings of words unspoken. Annabella's simple-sounding response was of this nature, and that her words had reached deep down in Letty Fenton was evidenced by the sudden imperious and slightly spiteful light that flashed in her brown eyes.

"What's eating you, Annabella?" she said with forced lightness. "You've had a sullen, crabbed look about you all day."

It was untrue. Neither the face of Annabella Saunders, nor the spirit of which it was the outward presentment, lent itself to sullenness. The unkind words of her cousin were an accurate reflection of their relationship, which, though begun in the spirit of the familial tie, had gradually become almost exclusively that of employer-employee.

As Letty Fenton's social secretary, Annabella received a good salary, with which she was able to support not only herself but her indigent parents in Ohio—parents once well to do. She realized quite well that her

salary was excessive, and that the excess was a piece of charity for the benefit of her parents. The fact tied her to her job.

She had moments of violent inner rebellion against the absence of any social life of her own. She too wanted sunlight! She wanted it in the symbolic sense. And now, sick to death of everlastingly gray skies, with the pallor of the inclement winter in her cheeks, she wanted it in an actual sense as well.

She rose, her face soft, her own eyes kind and a little pleading. She walked over to Letty, stood behind her, looking at her cousin's reflection in the glass.

"Won't you take me south with you, Letty?" she asked softly.

Letty whirled. There was something tigerish in that whirl. For an instant the secret reason for the antagonism that existed between the two flashed out of Letty Fenton's eyes. Letty was no superficial observer. Her eyes, when they beheld Annabella, beheld a beauty and charm greater than her own, and it was not for nothing that she shut her cousin away from her own set, with its parties and men.

"So that's it," she snapped. "You know I'll have no need of you down there. The answer is no."

Annabella continued to stand behind her.

"Well, why are you standing there?" Letty asked irritably.

Annabella's bosom was heaving. The urge to speak out overcame her. Her thoughts rushed out in a torrent of speech.

"I know your reason for not wanting me along, and it's not the one you give! It's that you can't bear to share anything with anyone! As your social secretary I'm an obscure mouse, unseen and unheard by anyone, and you're able to keep me that way for reasons you're well aware of. But as your cousin, mingling with people, I'd be in your eyes a dangerous rival! Not in my eyes—yours! That isn't what I want, that isn't why I asked. It's because I'm as deadly sick of this winter as you are! It's because I want to get away from it too! I'm

sick of dirty city snow and gray skies. I want sunlight!

Annabella rushed in.

"But you—you'd corner the sun itself, if you could. You'd keep it all to yourself if you could arrange it that way. You wouldn't care if the sun shone for nobody else so long as it shone for you. You'd like to own the sun so that its heat and light could be for yourself alone and nobody else! Preferably for nobody else!"

LETTY FENTON had risen, her face contorted. She was not beautiful now. Decorum and breeding had gone by the board at the bitter dissection of her motives by her cousin. She screamed out like a fish-wife:

"Yes! Yes, you ungrateful brat! I'd do it—I'd do what you said—I'd take the sun for myself if by doing it I could keep you from it!"

A strange expression flitted across her usually pale features, now suffused with a rush of blood. Her voice rose in a crescendo of insensate anger.

"Do you hear that, Sun!" she cried. "She says I want you all to myself, and after what she's said, I do, I do! I hope you never shine on her again—no, nor on anybody else! Now, get out!"

Annabella, alarm in her eyes, not for herself but because of the state her cousin had worked herself up to, murmured—"Letty . . ."

"Get out!"

Annabella left the room and went to her own to pack. It was obvious to her that she could no longer remain in this house.

Letty Fenton ran to her bed and threw herself full length upon it, face down, beating upon the covered pillow with clenched fists. The paroxysm passed. She turned, lay on her back, eyes closed, breathing quietly.

"Here I am, Letty," a voice said softly.

She opened her eyes. It was dark in the room. That was strange, for she was certain that the lights had been on before and that neither Annabella nor she had not turned them out.

"Here I am, Letty," the voice said again.

Letty turned her head. It seemed that she could make no other movement. Her lips were dry.

"Who is it?" she whispered. "Who spoke? Where are you?"

"Here, Letty."

"Where?"

"Can't you see me, Letty?"

"No."

"No? Then perhaps you can feel me. Yes, people feel me even when sometimes they don't see me."

"I—I feel warm."

"Yes, Letty. That is natural. That is the way I make people feel."

"Who—who are you?"

"Why, Letty—I am what you wanted."

"Wh-what I wanted? What did I want?"

The questions were coming mechanically from her lips.

"The Sun, Letty. I am the Sun. You wanted me, Letty. Remember? You wanted me all to yourself. I've come. Do you feel yourself getting warmer, Letty?"

"Yes . . ." the girl breathed.

"Warmer and warmer, Letty? Warmer and warmer?"

"Yes . . . don't come any closer—"

"Why not, Letty? You wanted me. I've come. I'm all yours, Letty."

"Go away." Now there was soft panic in the voice of the girl on the bed. "Go away. . . ."

"No, Letty. You cannot send me away now. You made your wish. You have it. I sang of life for all the humans on the little ball you call the earth. My heat and my light were for all two billion of them, and it was not my doing that some were shut away from me in prisons and in slums. Now my LIGHT—there was a silence—"and my HEAT"—there was another silence—"are all for YOU!"

IN THE twin silences Letty Fenton had screamed twice without a sound passing her lips. Her mouth formed the scream, her throat gave vent to it, but the screams were silent.

The place in which she was—it seemed no longer her room—was ablaze with light, and her body was burning with a fever past all mortal

experience. Eyes open, she saw the Sun!

He was a face, flame-made and gigantic, bending toward her. He was hands all aglow with fire-fingers crooked to take hold of her. He was a voice, no longer whispering now, but roaring in her ears.

"Deliver her over to me!"

She felt herself lifted, looked into a human face, found herself in the arms of a monk in cassock and cowl. The monk held her above a rectangular coffin filled with a hot yellow light. The brazier beside it gave off tongues of flame, and beside it was a small table bearing vials and bottles that seemed appropriate to a medieval alchemist's cellar.

"Here I am, Letty," the Sun whispered, and the sudden descent from roar to whisper robbed her of breath. Her lips moved, and now sounds came from them, sounds that made words, broken, tear-filled.

"Not—not for me alone . . . or—if it must be—not for me at all—but for all others . . . shine again . . . Shine down on the city . . . on its people . . . Shine on Annabella. . ."

LETTY FENTON became aware of herself standing by the bell-cord. The room was not dark, neither was it flame-filled. It was merely lighted by the familiar shaded lamps. The light illumined various objects—the statuette of the monk, the incense brazier, the bottles and vials on the vanity table.

She pulled on the bell-cord and remained standing there in the shadows. A moment later the door opened and Annabella came in, dressed for the street.

"You rang, Letty?" she inquired quietly.

Letty spoke softly and slowly, still standing in the shadows.

"Yes—I wondered if you'd have a cup of tea with me. I fell asleep and I believe I had a dream—it upset me. Incidentally, I wanted to tell you that I've been a beast and that I want you to come south with me. I was silly. Will you come?"

(Concluded on page 129)



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Why are millions interested? Is it because deep in the inner consciousness of man lies his thirst for the unknown? Since the beginning of time, man has asked: "What is beyond the grave?"

Every man fears Death—because Death seems greater than Life. Death has subdued Life—has been the inevitable victor. As long as man remembers, Life has been struggling to overcome Death—to break that record of triumph. But one cannot overcome an enemy unless one knows what that enemy is.

The Invisible Visitor

There are a number of people who believe that Death arrives in the form of a conscious being. One of the strangest cases supporting this belief was recorded in January, 1919, in the U. S. Army Base Hospital at Rue Prado, Marseilles, France. Here is the official record:

"Lieutenant Harry Doerringer lay dying on his cot. The doctor had announced him beyond hope of recovery due to infected lungs from mustard gas poisoning. His death was a matter of hours. Suddenly at 11 P. M. in the presence of witnesses, Doerringer stood up in his bed and glared blankly at the door as though someone was coming in. There was no one in the doorway visible to the witnesses. Doerringer then began to shout at the invisible visitor:

"Get out, get out, you damned fiend. I'm not going with you. I know who you are. You think you are coming to take me with you. But I won't go—I won't go."

"His curses were mingled with shouts and he cringed as if in terror as he seemed to watch someone coming closer to his bed. He struck out with his arms as though fighting off someone about to grab him. Then, in one frantic effort, he slumped dead on his bed as though shot by a rifle bullet. As he died, the door which had been partly open, slammed shut with a terrific crash, but no one had closed it and there was no breeze."

The Mysterious Window

Another strange case comes to us from

Phoenix, Arizona. A girl was on her death bed near an open window. She screamed to the nurse attending her, begging the nurse to shut the window.

Someone, she insisted, was trying to carry her through it and she didn't want to go. The nurse rushed from the other side of the room and endeavored to close the window to pacify the screaming girl. But as the nurse was about to pull it down, some invisible force struck the nurse across the shoulder and she slumped to the floor.

Stunned, the nurse tried to rise, but before she could get on her feet, she saw that the girl was dead. As the nurse went to the bed, the window slammed shut. No one was near it.

Strange? Yes—but so is Death. And this is only one aspect of this mysterious adversary. Perhaps, after all, Death is not really an enemy of Life. Perhaps it is just another form of Life—that which science calls a chemical reaction, when solids are turned into liquids, when liquids are changed into gas, or when matter through the mystery of fire becomes a gaseous substance leaving only ashes behind . . . not lost, but merely transformed.

When Does Death Strike?

When does a man die? Death of his body, science knows. Death of his spirit—who knows? Is the essence of Life consciousness or breath? Science says it is breath. But what of those mystics of the ages who claim that it is consciousness?

In an earlier issue of *The Black Arts*, you learned of the Great Cheiro, perhaps the most famous metaphysician of past generations. His real name was Count Louis Haman, and he died in 1936. It is interesting to read the account of his death as described by his English nurse who attended him in his last moment:

"Three separate times the clock tolled the hour of one. Near the end the whole house was filled with an overpowering fragrance of flowers. Yet there were no flowers in the room, and none outside. Still, we all smelled the fragrance and could smell it in the morning.

"I was sitting at the head of the stairs, except at the last moment—and they were empty. Yet they creaked as though an army of people were coming and going.

"Friends were just asking me how long I thought his strength would hold out, when the clock struck one. My wrist-watch showed twelve-fifteen. I thought nothing of it except that the big clock on the stairs was wrong. Twice again, at about ten minute intervals, it struck one. Cheiro died at one.

"Cheiro dead? Dead to bodily contact perhaps—but not to consciousness."

Dream Consciousness

What is consciousness? According to accepted definition it is the state of being aware—the apprehension of existence. But that does not necessarily imply the apprehension of physical existence. What of a dream consciousness?

In a dream, one is aware of existence—but of what existence? Have you ever been wounded in a dream? You saw blood, felt pain—but what kind of blood, what kind of pain? Conscious blood and conscious pain—but not physical. What then of ghost consciousness?

The Tower of London! What crimes have been committed within its sullen walls! What a tragic history of blood and pain! Many an Englishman will not deny the apprehension of ghostly existence still within this living tomb of terror. Many a resident of England believes that the ghost of Anne Boleyn still haunts the Tower of London.

The London *Daily Mail* only recently reported "a single blood-curdling scream which echoes and re-echoes through the massive edifice each midnight just as the Tower clock strikes twelve. First a groan gradually rising in pitch and intensity, ending in a ghastly shriek."

A White-Draped Figure

Soldiers and their wives have seen and heard the ghost many times. Huge doors fly open without apparent cause. Cold blasts of air sweep through various halls. Then all becomes still . . . still as death.

Here is an actual description recorded in British government files:

"Queen Anne Boleyn was clearly seen and identified by responsible persons . . . a white-draped figure, wandering about the chamber she occupied before her execution. . . ."

And other ghosts have been reported in the Tower. One is the Countess of Salisbury whose execution in 1541 was a horrible spectacle. She did not want to die

(Continued on page 120)



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(Continued from page 119)

and refused to cooperate with her executioner. She ran screaming about the head-block, pursued by the headsmen who kept striking at her with his axe. Spectators had to cover their eyes, as finally the thirsty axe split her head, and blood splashed the walls and flowed to the feet of the onlookers.

Double Murder

And remember the double murder of the boy King, Edward V and his brother, the Duke of York? This perhaps was the most cruel and fiendish crime ever committed within the Tower of London. The man who engineered this crime was James Tyrrel. He smothered one boy and stabbed the other. Then he secretly buried both little bodies which were not discovered for nearly two centuries.

It was shortly after their bodies were found and their bones buried in Westminster Abbey that the ghost of Tyrrel appeared. Why had he returned? What kind of tormented consciousness had brought him back to react his ghastly deed before a possibly phantom audience?

Thirteen ghosts in all have been definitely reported. Why such a favored few? Are their consciousnesses stronger than the scores of others who met death by force within the tragic Tower?

There are certain skeptics who attribute it all to trickery. But go to the Tower of London today. Ask the soldiers, their wives, the Yeomen Wardens and all others who make their home within the Tower. For years they have been seeking the explanation. But as one writer, Tomaso Cellani, puts it:

"In such a building, so ancient and so befouled with legal crime, the chances are heavily against it being a piece of trickery. In view of this, therefore, it would be infinitely better to put the investigation of this phenomenon into the hands of competent, scientific spiritists. Such men and women, knowing that there can be no haunting without good and sufficient reason, may possibly find it in their power to help the anguished spirit, now at large."

But can living man reach the consciousness of the dead? Who knows?

The Hermit Scientist

Deep in the hills of Northern New Jersey there lives a hermit scientist. Not more than a handful of friends have ever visited him, and then only by invitation. He wants no publicity. He refuses to allow his name mentioned for publication.

Over 70 and long retired from active science, he is seeking the unknown—the consciousness of man beyond the grave. He speaks of death as "precipitation." In chemistry that means "the process by which any substance in solution is made to separate as a solid and appear in its true form."

He speaks of the human body being a solution of mind and matter—most of it

being water. Death is the process of precipitation which separates mind and matter, liberating mind in its true form, that of spiritual consciousness.

Who are we to call him crazy?

Those who have seen him in his laboratory are conscious of more than an old-man scientist. We laughed once when he said that his wife helps him, knowing that his wife had been dead for over twenty years. But we don't laugh now. Were we hypnotized when we saw him pour a liquid into a large test tube filled with a red solution, out of which came a strange vapor which, before it dissipated in the atmosphere of the room, took on the mist-like form of a human body?

Were we drugged when out of a mass of what smelled like burning rubber, we heard a whisper of a human voice? It seemed to come from the chemical reaction taking place before our eyes. Just a mass of matter liberating gases and strange sounds.

Man's Substance

And we were perfectly sane when the old scientist showed us a jar of mixed chemicals. He said the jar contained in exact proportions every chemical in a human body. And we knew he was right when he described it as "man's substance in all but consciousness and form." And even if he had displayed these chemicals in the form of a human body, we would still feel that the most important part was missing—consciousness.

Look at a human body lying in death and you can sense the departure of something which might once have been confined in that body, yet was never a part of it. But if consciousness were just a part of a body, why cannot we feel its presence even in death? For the human body being chemical, the law of conservation of matter should still apply.

In either case, consciousness does depart and take on another form—a form not visible to the human eye nor controlled by the laws of chemistry. And according to this scientist, he is seeking the true manifestation of consciousness by endeavoring to prepare a receptacle through which it can make itself felt and heard. Will he succeed? Only time will tell—and who are we to scoff?

Mystery of the Unknown

But he is not the only one seeking the mystery of the unknown. In twenty-seven universities and colleges throughout North America, scientists are experimenting day after day, endeavoring to find the answer to the eternal question: "Does human consciousness survive the grave?"

Many of them believe the affirmative—but until some scientific means of communication has been established, the question remains conjectural, regardless of the fact that astonishing phenomena have been reported in certain cases.

(Continued on page 122)

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(Continued from page 121)

One important finding has been the electric-like flash at the moment of death. Numerous tests were made in private hospitals where doctors had reported certain persons at death's door. In a dimly lighted room too dark for photography, cameras were set up. As the doctor reported the patient breathing his last, the film was exposed until the person was dead.

Death's Flash

When the sensitive films were developed, the negatives were dark except for one tiny spark-like streak, always the same in every negative. No explanation could be given other than the theory of "death's flash" long associated with the burning out of the human bulb.

Many primitive tribes have told tales of the "lightning God," another term for death; for in the dark of the jungle, natives have seen the flash of death. Some witch-doctors refuse to consider a native dead until the flash has been seen. And there have been many tales of "light" associated with births of children. When certain natives of Tibet, India and the Far East see the "light of birth," they immediately pay homage to the child, believing that a great soul has been reborn. In this category belongs the Star of Bethlehem.

What does this light of birth and the flash of death imply if such traditions are to be believed? Perhaps, that human consciousness is not of the earth as is the body—and that life is a spark of consciousness which is eternal . . . never born of itself and never destroyed by death.

Scientists are now working on such a possibility. They admit defeat in trying to locate the origin of consciousness within the body. They believe the contact is somewhere in the brain, but not originating in the brain itself, any more than your radio-set is the substance of the broadcast which you hear.

Are Ghosts Possible?

Thus, if your body is merely the contact of consciousness, death cannot destroy the consciousness, but merely removes bodily contact. Where does that consciousness go? Perhaps some scientist will soon be able to tell you with scientific proof even before death has broken your present contact of physical existence.

Hence, the possibility of ghosts, those disturbed consciousnesses which have found some psychic means of earthly contact. As one scientist puts it: "Perhaps earthbound ghosts are pathological cases, just as many humans are mentally distressed due to some emotional upset."

The possibility of ghosts is becoming more and more accepted by the public. Recently, the conservative New York *Herald-Tribune* carried the following item:

"London: The Hooded Horror of Hingham, one of the renowned quartet of British ghosts, braved a war-time blackout last night to welcome Frederick Sanders whose hobby is ghost-hunting.

"Sanders had bicycled to the village of Hingham, Kent, to investigate the story of four apparitions said to haunt the Manor House there. He was standing at the top of a flight of steps when the Hooded Horror came up, keeping close to the wall. When Sanders went down to meet it, the ghost disappeared.

"According to the legend, the Hooded Horror is the ghost of a monk who was buried many years ago in the grounds. The other three local specters are a galloping horseman, a white lady and a woman in black."

Fear of the Unknown

Men fear ghosts as they would fear some living object from another world were it to appear on Earth suddenly. For the most part, this is due to fear of the unknown, since ghostly apparitions have not generally been known to attack people, are not usually considered evil. But there are cases on record where ghosts have caused bodily harm. The strongest man shudders in terror when confronted by an evil apparition, because physical defense is useless. Here is an actual experience reported by Samuel Demler of Pennsylvania:

"Natives told me of the Ghost of the Harvey Well, a huge apparition that had been seen several times standing beside an old well on the deserted Harvey estate. Curious, one evening at twilight, I stopped at the Harvey place to look at the well. It was about five feet in diameter, the water about ten feet from the top. I had been told it was over eighty feet deep. I looked down at its slimy surface.

"Suddenly I felt a presence behind me. I turned. A huge black form with fiendish face glared at me. I knew it was something not of this world. Before I could move away, I felt a force hit me in the chest. It came not from an arm but as though some strange power had shot from this creature's body. I toppled backward into the well. Luckily I am a good swimmer and in time I managed to wriggle out of the well by using my feet and shoulders to brace me. The ghost was gone. Friends still think it was my imagination and that I had stumbled. But the bruise on my chest told me otherwise."

Fairbanks' Supreme Energy

Only a short while ago, the world was shocked to hear of the death of Douglas Fairbanks, a popular figurehead of virile life, health and activity. Then suddenly in California as though a bolt of lightning had zoomed from the starlit heavens, the great consciousness of Fairbanks was short-circuited. His body became an inanimate mass of matter, never again to express the true essence of supreme energy.

A flash of death had subdued a great flash of life. A popular human-radio had burned out. But what of the energy which had for so many years expressed itself

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 123)

through that set? Is that gone too? His nurse had been standing by the window in his room. She felt a breeze pass her shoulder through the window into the stillness of the night. She turned. Douglas Fairbanks was dead.

Will the ghost of Fairbanks hover over Hollywood, the place he loved in life? Or will it be able to leave and forget while seeking greater adventures on the deserts of the Unknown?

Apparitions, specters of death, ghosts—perhaps mere words of fancy to some, but to others expressions of consciousness beyond the grave. Who knows? Are we not, perhaps, all ghosts in human form?

For Lovecraft Fans

The name of the late H. P. Lovecraft has long been synonymous with fantasy and science fiction. Readers of *outré* literature will be glad to learn that a splendid collection of his stories has just appeared. It is entitled **THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS** and published by Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin.

The book of over 500 pages is handsomely put together, with a beautiful jacket design by Virgil Finlay, but more important are the stories that have made H. P. Lovecraft rank with Edgar Allan Poe in the field of supernatural horror. There are thirty-six of them, some short, some long, and the subject matter ranges, as the jacket description so aptly puts it, "from the fantasy of **THE CATS OF ULTHAR** to the nerve-shattering terror of **THE OUTSIDER**, from **THE COLOUR OUT OF SPACE** that scourged a New England farm to the primordial evil that slithered through **THE CALL OF CTHULHU**, from the cosmic splendors that sweep **THROUGH THE GATES OF THE SILVER KEY** to the super-cosmic titanicisms that lurk forever **AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS**."

The editors, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, aside from having performed a work of love with noteworthy care and taste, have contributed an introductory note with biographical data about Lovecraft. And a particularly fine feature of the book is Lovecraft's excellent essay, **SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN LITERATURE**, which provides the reader with a clear background of the field.

—LUCIFER.

LETTERS FROM READERS

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us. Don't imagine you like that, do you?"
 "We love it," was the prompt response that left him scratching his head.

And we do! We're anxious to get your reactions to **STRANGE STORIES**, and you're doing a splendid job via Uncle Sam. The only thing we could complain about is that *all* of you don't write. That would be a real treat—and we'd even spend the wee hours of the morning reading your suggestions and criticisms. So chip in and make us work! See if we care!

Our mail is divided now between miscellaneous, general letters and those pertaining to the **BLACK ARTS CLUB**. First, we'll take up the former. Among the many interesting letters we've received is one from a new reader:

I've just finished reading my first issue of **STRANGE STORIES** and found every story, every page good reading, thrilling from beginning to end. I have no brick-bats to throw. The variety of stories is written by the variety of writers for the vast variety of readers. The kickers should realize that every story is not written for one and the same individual. Story A thrills me. Story B also has a bunch of fans whether you hear from them or not.

I think **THE BLACK ARTS CLUB** will be a swell idea. Discussions of the supernatural always interested me. Ernie Graham.
 Canton, Miss.

And here's one from a constant reader:

I have read every publication of **STRANGE STORIES** that has come out, and I think it's a swell hook. Please keep it just as it is. Most of the other books of this type have changed. I believe this is the best yet and I hope it doesn't go Science or Detective. Thelma Witsman.
 Akron, Ohio.

Just to keep us on our toes, a reader has written a very interesting critical letter on one of the stories in the last issue:

I have just bought your Feb. 1940, issue of **STRANGE STORIES**. It is swell. However, one story, **DIRGE**, by Thorp McClusky, gripped my interest because my field of endeavor lies in music. The story is in the year of 1883 at the start. I don't see how the author could make such a bad mistake by mentioning Arensky as a major musical figure of that year. It happens that Arensky was born in 1860 and first graduated from the Moscow Conservatory of Music in 1885. Arensky is not a powerful figure in Russian musical history, so I don't see why he should get mention at all.

He damned Scriabine, who is the greatest musical genius of the 20th century, and was a salon writer who wrote the same way at 25 until the day he died in the year 1906. The mention of Rachmaninoff and his "Isle of the Dead" was as fine a description for the story as anything yet written. My highest praise to the author on this point. However, another bad error. From the way the story is written, one would think Rachmaninoff's "Isle of the Dead" was written before

(Continued on page 126)

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(Continued from page 125)

Arensky's time. It so happens Rachmaninoff was a pupil of Arensky, and did not write the piece until 1909, three years after Arensky's death. I think the author could be a little more exact in collecting his data for a story. Even if the story is strange, we could at least have correct information which is history.

Keep up the splendid work. I don't intend my criticism to be destructive but helpful.
Berwyn, Ill. Willis Charkovsky.

We appreciate the spirit in which this letter was written, and are glad to receive factual criticisms of our stories. But we are prepared to defend the stories when that becomes necessary.

Arensky's reactionary qualities do not concern us or the story; and there are many authorities who would most certainly disagree with Mr. Charkovsky on the claim he makes about Scriabine. But the important points pertaining to the story can be answered. Arensky, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, was born in 1861 and was professor of music at Moscow Conservatory in 1882. He was a teacher of his day. Rachmaninoff was a pupil of his in 1885. It does not matter if he was a powerful figure or not, as far as the story is concerned. And although Rachmaninoff wrote his "Isle of the Dead" later, we must remember that the person telling the story is doing so from a background of years, reminiscing. Hence his mention of the piece could be made without an anachronistic note being struck.

We hope this clarifies the issue. All thanks, too, for Reader Charkovsky's interest and sincere intentions.

Black Arts Club Letters

And now for the **BLACK ARTS CLUB**. Thanks for the response to our call for members. We can't print all the names but we're publishing a partial list of those names that came in first. And of those applying for Master's certificates we've selected three letters as representative of the ones we've received.

Here's the experience that Claud C. Ham of Washington, D. C., relates for his Master's card:

During attendance of one of Professor Wm. Estep's lectures (Prof. Estep is the American Mahatma sponsoring Super Mind Science) he elected to allay my skepticism by reading my *ashtma* (astral record).

This he did by placing my hand on his mouth and throat to detect any use of normal voice and then producing a thin reedy voice from the top of my head. If there was a trick I couldn't detect it and I was told things of my past that I had long since forgotten.

Strange? Yes, we think so, and the incident that comes to us from Donald Rollo of Milton, Fla., also warrants a Master's card:

My grandfather, George Jordan, owned a farm near Birmingham, Alabama, on which were many mules that worked in the fields. He had one mule that was his favorite—a husky, fine looking animal named Mary. Late every afternoon he would ride Mary home from the fields. In the middle of the road that led from the fields to the house there was a sink-hole.

From all outward appearances it was just a common sink-hole—just one of many that is found

all over the South. But Mary knew that something was out of the ordinary about the hole, for she refused to cross over it. Every time she would get near the hole she would stop suddenly and then run the other way as fast as she could.

Grandfather examined the spot time and again, but found nothing that would possibly be the cause of Mary's fright. One day grandfather and the mule were coming home as usual. The road was very slippery for it had rained very hard. When they reached the spot in the road this time, Mary almost threw grandfather off her back because she had stopped so suddenly.

There, rising from the sink-hole, was a black, shapeless figure. Grandfather quickly drew his knife and hurled it with all his strength at the figure. But the knife passed completely through the shape. By this time Mary had collected her wits and she started running as fast as she could with her rider clinging desperately to her back.

From this time on Mary would not go near even the road. And after every hard rain grandfather could see the same figure rising from the depression in the road. Nobody ever investigated it, for people there believed in letting well enough alone. One might think the figure was a natural happening caused by rain—but Mary, the mule, knew otherwise.

And finally we have a weird experience from Don Miller of St. Paul, Minnesota:

Some time ago I was at a girl's house making a social call. I left the house at about 11:30 P. M. When I was about halfway home I found that I had forgotten my hat, so I went back to get it. I glanced through a window in the door before I rang the bell, and I saw an old lady crossing the room inside. This surprised me as I did not think there was anyone else in the house except the girl.

The old lady vanished into another room. I rang the doorbell and the girl soon answered. After I had gotten my hat I asked the girl who the old lady was. She was greatly shocked and said there was no old lady in the house.

I described the woman I had seen. After she heard my description she showed me a picture and

(Continued on page 128)

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(Continued from page 127)
asked me if it looked like the woman I had seen. It was the same person.
When I told the girl so, she revealed that it was a picture of her mother who had been dead for three years and whom I had never seen!
Did I see a ghost or was it a telephatic picture of some kind? What do you think?

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So, until next time, *au revoir*.
—THE EDITOR.

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(Concluded from page 117)

Letty Fenton had stepped into the light. "What's the matter?" she asked. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Letty"—Annabella's eyes were wide and frightened—"what's happened to you? You're—you're *suntanned!*"

Letty Fenton walked slowly to the mirror. She gave no start when she saw her face reflected in it. She was silent for a long time, looking. At last she said:

"Don't be frightened, dear. After you left I just put on a sun-tan make-up to see how I would look when we got back from Florida. Come, let's have our tea."

And although Annabella knew that there was not a bit of sun-tan makeup anywhere in that house, and that Letty had never in her life used any, she said nothing more about it, either then or later. They had their tea, and felt very close to each other.

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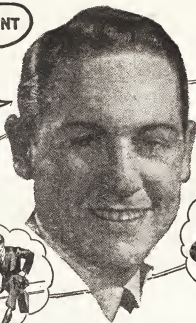
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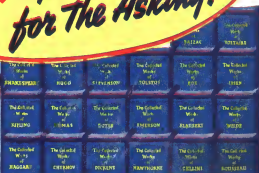
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